



Scenario Thinking in Action Series

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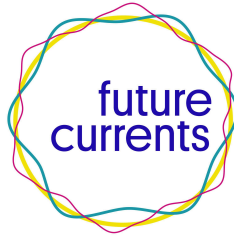
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Scenario Exercise Primer

This resource provides information on scenario planning and helpful tips for getting the most out of a scenario exercise.

What is scenario thinking? Why does it matter?

What are scenarios?

Scenarios are stories about the possible futures we may find ourselves living in. Scenarios are not predictions; they are provocative and plausible narratives informed by signals and trends observable in the current moment. They present an opportunity to consider where we'll find ourselves in the future, what conditions might be inside or outside of our influence and control, and how all of that might encourage us to adapt our strategies and tactics now in order to be better prepared for what's coming.

What is scenario thinking? Why do we engage in scenario exercises?

Scenario thinking is a process through which scenarios are developed and used to inform strategy. It's a way of thinking about and managing changes in our world, and engaging with future possibilities to be better prepared for what's to come. Engaging in scenario thinking challenges our assumptions, stretches our imaginations, resources our strategies and tactics, and creates new sources of hope.

Participants report many benefits to engaging in scenario thinking:

- Immersing yourself in the possible conditions of the future can help inoculate you emotionally against challenges you may face.
- Considering the political, social, and cultural landscape of a specific time can help you and your organization clarify your strategic roles.
- Contemplating possible choice points in the future can help you and your organization, network, and community better inform strategy and boost alignment to be better prepared for collective action.

Ultimately, regularly engaging in scenario thinking empowers you to make better strategic decisions from near to long-term.

What are Future Currents' scenario tools?

Scenario planning tools provide a framework for well-researched scenarios based in an accurate sense of the current context and plausible future conditions. They can help you consider how best to meet and change future conditions with dexterity and preparedness.

To ensure partners can engage in the critical scenario thinking that guides our strategies and actions from near- to long-term, we are providing scenario planning templates of our scenario planning tools for partners to adapt and integrate scenario thinking into their own work. Access [here](#).

Before engaging with scenario exercises as a participant, it's important to:

Establish Purposes and Outcomes

Purpose states why you, your organization, or network are engaging in scenario thinking.

Outcomes state what you, your organization, or network hope to gain by engaging in scenario thinking. As an example:

Purposes could be: an organization might engage in scenario thinking to:

- Expose participants to plausible future political, social, and cultural conditions that will affect our ability to achieve our campaign goals
- Strengthen participants' future-orientation in strategic development,
- Immerse participants in a brief yet vivid plausible future moment to consider how your current strategies hold up or need to adapt under uncertain conditions,
- Spark strategic reflection on how you may navigate a given future moment, or
- Identify key partners to build or deepen relationships with to more effectively meet and shape future conditions.

Outcomes could be to: By engaging in scenario thinking, an organization might hope to:

- Identify strategies you want to prepare now to meet likely future pivot points,
- Understand how organizational priorities might shift given the opportunities and threats that might arise in various plausible futures, or
- Build trust amongst participants so that they may rely on each other in the face of future conditions.

To help keep the exercise focused and to be realistic about what we can achieve, we typically set 2-3 goals for purpose and 2-3 desired outcomes.

Set “Ground Rules” for Engaging in Scenario Thinking

Scenario exercises can offer an experimental, but sometimes uncomfortable space to strategize as you face future conditions that may be challenging. We provide a set of ground rules to help participants be as fully present and comfortable as they can during these exercises. You may have ground rules your folks are already familiar with and it's fine to use those. Here are some we have found helpful:

- **Don't fight the scenario:** Scenarios are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both;
- **Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting:** When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas. People should have the space to share initial ideas (even if they're not fully fleshed out) and bolder strategic thinking without worrying they are committing to any specific work.
- **Take the lessons, leave the names:** Consider establishing a rule like this so that people can creatively engage with the conditions without concerns their remarks will be shared outside the group.
- **Take care of yourself:** Scenarios can present some conditions that might be challenging, especially conditions that are escalations of the current moment—which is already difficult to face. Be as fully present and participatory as possible, but take the space you need to take care of yourself and invite others to take care of you if you need it.
- **Know scenario exercises are educational and focused on helping you with strategy development:** We're not endorsing any particular outcome. The purpose of this scenario thinking is to explore various possible futures to better guide your strategy and efforts.
- **Recording scenario planning exercises:** To ensure that participants feel that they can speak candidly, we advise against recording scenario planning exercises, as many people feel uncomfortable speaking if they think that they are being recorded.

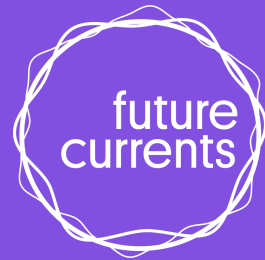
Feel free to add to this list of ground rules to fit your group's needs. If you are adapting our scenario planning tools to run your own exercise, share purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for engaging in scenario thinking with your participants prior to the exercise to set them up for success with clear expectations and guidance on how to be fully engaged.

Scenario Office Hours

To support you in using and adapting our scenario planning tools, Future Currents is facilitating office hours for partners who'd like to expand their scenario thinking and strategize to prepare for future conditions. We can answer questions you might have, help you develop the tools for use with your group, and help identify points of connectivity across the movement. If you're interested, please sign up using this [google form](#)!

Sign Up for Future Currents Newsletter

To stay updated on Future Currents' insights, resources, and news, sign up [here](#).



Scenario Thinking in Action

Moment in Time

Explore one moment through multiple lenses

What is this tool?

- Moment in Time is a short-form tool designed to take about 20 minutes.
- This version includes four vignettes all happening on June 21, 2026.
- You'll spin a wheel to determine which moment in time (place, issue, condition, etc), you'll drop into.
- Prompts will guide you to reflect on what you might do in that context and what you could do today to be better prepared.
- Use it for solo reflection or complete it with a group for shared discussion and analysis.
- Want to make your own? Click [here](#) to learn more.

Scenario Set-Up

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through the “Scenario Exercise Primer” in this packet for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise.

Once you’ve read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Purpose:

- Immerse participants in a brief yet vivid plausible future to consider how your current strategies hold up or need to adapt in uncertain conditions.
- Spark strategic reflection on how you may navigate potential future conditions.

Outcomes:

- Identify how future conditions could shift or reshape your work.
- Consider how organizational priorities might shift given the opportunities and threats that might arise in various plausible futures.

Ground Rules:

- **Don’t fight the scenario:** These vignettes are not predictions, but possibilities. Sit with the uncertainty.
- **Use this as a sandbox:** Explore bold ideas without needing to commit.
- **Care for yourself and others:** Some futures may feel close to home. Take space if needed.

How to use this tool

- 1** **Spin the wheel and drop into a moment in time.** Imagine yourself there. What choices would you make? What difficult trade-offs or risks might you and your organization have to navigate?
- 2** Use the **reflection prompts** that follow to think it through—solo or with your team.
- 3** **Repeat** to explore the other vignettes and consider how nimble your current strategy is. Can it flex to meet each moment or will it need to adapt.

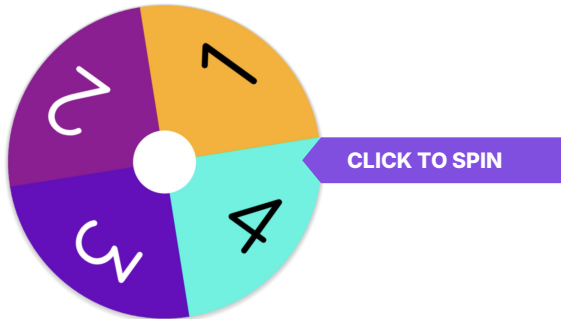


It's June 21, 2026...

Where are you on June 21, 2026?

1

Click the wheel. Navigate to the site. Spin the wheel to determine where you are.



2

Prepare to dive into your specific context. Where will you be located and what will you do?

3

Select the number you landed on below.

1

2

3

4

1. Miami, FL

It's June 21, 2026. A World Cup match in Miami is drawing a global audience, but protest is simmering just outside the stadium. Less than a mile away, community members have gathered for a mass protest sparked by an explosive whistleblower report out of the "Alligator Alcatraz" and "Deportation Depot" detention centers. The report alleges that detained immigrants have been forced into unpaid agricultural labor across the state under the guise of "public-private partnership." Law enforcement has declared the protest an unauthorized assembly and the governor is preparing to call in the National Guard. Social media posts using protest hashtags are being shadowbanned to prevent that content from being seen on social platforms. A livestream covering the protest abruptly cut out as the person filming was tackled and detained by plain-clothes officers.

Proceed to the next slide to reflect on your situation.

1. MIAMI, FL

Reflection Prompts

1

When public spaces are shut down and online platforms are unreliable, how can your dissent still break through?

2

What alternative tools, partnerships, or offline strategies would you activate to stay connected and visible?

3

What advice would you give yourself today to be better prepared for this future?

2. Online, Nationwide

It's June 21, 2026. Following a federal raid on a migrant justice organizing hub, carried out with visible support from ICE recruits sporting Oath Keepers tattoos or patches, online mobilization has surged. In the hours since, posts with protest hashtags have been deleted and several advocacy organizations are being flagged as national security risks to the FBI. Internal chat platforms like Signal are glitching. At least one staff member has received a phishing email designed to mimic a federal subpoena. The security of digital communication is shifting fast and trust in your usual channels is starting to fray.

Proceed to the next slide to reflect on your situation.

2. ONLINE, NATIONWIDE

Reflection Prompts

1

How might you adapt your internal and external communication strategies to mitigate the risks posed?

2

If someone in your network were targeted by deceptive digital tactics, how would you respond and what support systems exist to help them and you navigate that moment?

3

What advice would you give yourself today to be better prepared for this future?

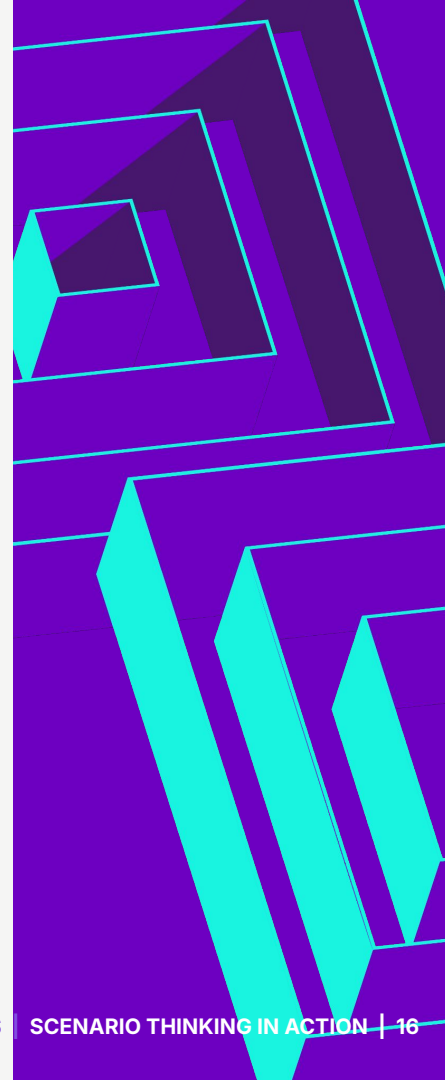
3. Southern Oregon

It's June 21, 2026. Days after an intense lightning storm, a fast-moving wildfire has torn through parts of southern Oregon. The blaze moved faster than local alerts, cutting off entire towns before residents could evacuate. With the blaze threatening roads and taking out cell towers, emergency response crews are struggling to access the region.

Mutual aid networks have mobilized with ATVs, boats, and radios, but disinformation is spreading. Disinformation suggesting accepting unregistered aid will disqualify you from FEMA benefits and that drones being used to help firefighters track the spread of the fire are actually monitoring aid drop-offs have some residents rebuffing help from community organizers. Federal officials have yet to confirm what immediate or long-term recovery support will be offered.

Meanwhile, some national news networks are offering glowing coverage of the America 250 "Innovation and Resilience" pavilion where visitors line up to experience a sleek VR wildfire mitigation simulation just 40 miles from the real burn zone while suggesting "woke protestors" are responsible for starting the live fire.

Proceed to the next slide to reflect on your situation.



3. SOUTHERN OREGON

Reflection Prompts

1

Imagine your group is based in Oregon under these conditions. What action would you take?

2

What does this moment reveal about the strengths and vulnerabilities of your current strategy - particularly around communication, trust, and coordination with frontline partners?

3

What advice would you give yourself today to be better prepared for this future?

4. Philadelphia, PA

It's June 21, 2026. With mere weeks until the U.S. marks its 250th anniversary, Philadelphia is ground zero for the Trump administration's America250 campaign. Streets near Independence Hall are swarming with security, military vehicles have been spotted rehearsing for the July 4th parade, and Trump himself is headlining the "Patriots Gala" at the Constitution Center.

City resources have been rerouted to accommodate federal needs — surveillance towers have gone up, trash collection and community services have slowed in surrounding neighborhoods. Federal law enforcement, including groups of armed ICE agents, have been roving neighborhoods rounding up unhoused residents in what's being called an "emergency beautification blitz."

Long planned pro-democracy counter-programming faces intense scrutiny after the initial permits were rejected. Organizers promise to deliver, but details are scarce.

Proceed to the next slide to reflect on your situation.



4. PHILADELPHIA, PA

Reflection Prompts

1

What is one concrete move you, your organization, or the broader movement could take to ensure your values and voice still shape the narrative of this moment?

2

How would you balance organizational and staff security with fulfilling your organizational mission?

3

What advice would you give yourself today to be better prepared for this future?

Want to make your own?

- Consult our “Moment in Time Template” in this packet. This will give you the tools you need to draft your own vignettes and guidance on writing reflection prompts.
- Interested in other Future Currents scenario tools? Navigate to “Future Currents Scenario Planning Templates” in this packet!

Voila! Your very own Moment in Time exercise!

Moment in Time Template [Instructions]

Before beginning to develop your Moment in Time tool, you may want to read through the [scenario exercise primer](#) for background on scenario thinking and helpful tips for how to get the most out of these tools.

The Moment in Time scenario tool is a short-form strategic exercise, typically lasting about 20 minutes. It can be used by individuals but is particularly well suited to groups. It's formatted as [a slide deck](#) that's great for small groups with access to a projector or groups working online, though it can also be printed and shared offline. You might use it at the beginning of a meeting to spark strategic conversation or integrate it into a retreat or campaign planning session. It also works well as an asynchronous activity. Participants can engage on their own time and bring reflections back to a group. No facilitation is required, making it an easy, low-lift but high-impact way to introduce scenario thinking.

We recommend allowing 2-4 hours to build a complete Moment in Time exercise from the ground up. If you are already regularly engaged in signals chasing, a key part of the scenario building process that we'll discuss in detail in this guide, a Moment in Time exercise could be developed in 60 minutes.

How to Build a Moment in Time Exercise

Drafting your own Moment in Time exercise starts by customizing your purpose and identifying who will participate and how. Next, develop reflection questions and strategic prompts. Finally, you'll identify a pivot point and future date and craft a set of four vignettes that are playing out on that future date. Below, you'll find detailed step-by-step instructions. Here is a simple checklist condensing the steps for ease of review:

1. Determine the purpose, participants, and process for your exercise
 - ☐ Customize your purpose and outcomes
 - ☐ Determine who will participate
 - ☐ Confirm your ground rules
 - ☐ Set a time duration and format for your exercise
2. Develop reflection questions and strategic prompts
 - ☐ Draft reflection questions
 - ☐ Draft strategy assessment questions
 - ☐ Draft action-oriented questions
3. Craft the scenario
 - ☐ Set a pivot point

- ☐ Set a future date for your scenario
- ☐ Identify areas of focus
- ☐ Develop conditions using signals and trends
- ☐ Draft Your vignettes

1. Determining the purpose, participants, and process

1A. Establish your purpose and outcomes. Suggested purposes and outcomes have been pre-populated but you may wish to edit or add to them. The purpose should state why you, your organization, network, etc. are engaging in scenario thinking. And the outcomes reflect what you hope to gain by engaging in scenario thinking. To help keep the exercise focused and to be realistic about what we can achieve, we typically set 2-3 goals for purpose and 2-3 desired outcomes.

If you would like to edit or add your own items under Purpose and Outcomes, you can add them on Slide 2 of the [Moment in Time deck](#):

Scenario Set-Up

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Purpose:

- Immerse participants in a brief yet vivid, plausible future moment to consider how your current strategies hold up or need to adapt under uncertain conditions.
- Spark strategic reflection on how you may navigate a given future moment
- Practice applying future-oriented thinking in day-to-day work

Outcomes:

- Explore how future conditions could shift or reshape your work
- Consider how organizational priorities might shift given the opportunities and threats

1B. Determine who will participate in your scenario. In fact, you may know this even before you've clarified your purpose and outcomes. For instance, you may be asked to lead the icebreaker for a staff meeting or you may be using this tool to engage staff or member leaders in asynchronous scenario thinking. If you are deciding on participants in your process, let your purpose and outcomes guide who you invite. Each person should be invited because they are needed to accomplish your goals in the meeting and in the work you will do coming out of the meeting.

In either case your decisions about purpose and participants will mutually shape each other. Reflect on how *that group* will fulfill *the purpose* of the scenario exercise.

1C. Confirm the ground rules. For this short activity, suggested ground rules have been pre-populated, but you may wish to edit or add to them for the particular dynamics of your group.

If you would like to edit or add your own ground rules, you can add them on Slide 3 of the [Moment in Time deck](#):

<h2>Ground Rules</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't fight the scenario. These vignettes are not predictions, but possibilities. Sit with the uncertainty.• Use this as a sandbox. Explore bold ideas without needing to commit.• Care for yourself and others. Some futures may feel close to home. Take space if needed.
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1D. Set the duration and format of your exercise

The template is designed for it to take approximately 20 minutes to experience and reflect on one vignette. If you have more time and are working with a group, you may opt to have people take 20 minutes to work through vignettes independently before reconvening for a group discussion exploring how different future possibilities require the similar or distinct strategic adjustments. Or, if you prefer to work as one group, consider going through more than one vignette in a sitting and compare how the experiences and associated responses are similar or different.

2. Edit reflection and strategy prompts

Each vignette in the *Moment in Time* exercise is followed by three prompts, each from a distinct question type - reflection, strategy assessment, and action-oriented. These are designed to help participants engage with the scenario emotionally, analytically, and practically.

To simplify setup, the tool comes pre-populated with one core question from each type, which you can use as-is, edit to better fit your group, or supplement with additional prompts depending on your goals and available time.

We recommend using the same three questions across all four vignettes to provide a consistent frame for discussion and comparison.

- **Reflection Questions:** These questions invite participants to notice their initial emotional and intuitive responses to the scenario. They are meant to surface hopes, concerns, or internal shifts sparked by the future conditions — and help participants imagine their own role within the world of the vignette.
 - Pre-populated question: What stands out to you in this future? What's surprising, familiar, or emotionally charged?
- **Strategy Assessment Questions:** These types of questions invite participants to analyze how their current strategies, assumptions, or alliances might interact with the conditions in the vignette. What still works? What's at risk? What needs to be rethought?
 - Pre-populated question: How might your current strategy or approach succeed or fall short in this future?
- **Action-Oriented Questions:** These questions help participants connect the future to today. They ask what investments, practices, or relationships need to be strengthened now to be ready for a future like this.
 - Pre-populated question: What would need to be built, protected, or let go of today to meet this future with more readiness?

When you have your discussion prompts, you can populate them on Slides 7, 9, 11, and 13 of the [Moment in Time deck](#):

Vignette #1 - Reflection Prompts

1. What stands out to you in this future? What's surprising, familiar, or emotionally charged?
2. How might your current strategy or approach succeed or fall short in this future?
3. What would need to be built, protected, or let go of today to meet this future with more readiness?

7

3. Craft the scenario

The four vignettes that illustrate distinct events happening at the same future point that you want your group to engage—using these steps:

- Identify pivot points
- Set your future date
- Develop conditions using signals and trends

- Identify your four areas of focus
- Draft your vignettes

3A. Identify pivot points. Pivot points are significant political, social, and cultural events on the horizon or significant changes in conditions that present crisis or opportunity moments that are critical to engage. For example, a pivot point could be a union contract fight, an election, a pandemic, a tropical storm or tornado, or a new executive order or law.

You will likely be considering a primary pivot point as you identify the need for a scenario exercise in the first place. For example, you might be preparing for a potential governing moment, a significant cultural event, or a Supreme Court decision. But there are many others that also will impact the conditions in which you are fighting. To identify the right pivot points to include in your scenario, consider what events on the horizon or changing conditions are critical moments to build power and meet your desired outcomes. A few key pivot points will anchor your scenario.

3B. Set your future date. In Moment in Time, all participants engage with the same date in the future. This is the anchoring moment when multiple things are unfolding across the country or movement ecosystem. Choose a specific date that reflects a plausible version of the near future, typically within 1 to 5 years.

You don't need to map every detail of the broader landscape, but it helps to loosely sketch what's happening in that moment. For example:

- Is the country in the middle of a major election cycle?
- Is a cultural milestone, climate event, or policy change dominating public attention?
- Are there new conditions reshaping the work on the ground?

Think of this date as the "shared weather system" — different groups are experiencing it in different ways, but they're all under the same sky.

For example, on June 26, 2026, we might anticipate that the U.S. is preparing to celebrate its 250th anniversary, FIFA World Cup matches are happening across several cities, and extreme heat and weather events are impacting parts of the country, creating tensions and opportunities around national identity, public space, and civic infrastructure.

3C. Develop conditions using signals and trends. To build plausible future conditions, we engage in signals chasing. Signals are early signs of change, showing us how the future might be different from the present. It's important to understand the difference between signals and trends and employ both in developing conditions.

Trends are patterns of change that are already largely visible and mainstream. They represent broad shifts that are happening over time. Signals are more specific, often surprising examples that hint at these larger shifts before they become obvious. They are current, concrete, and usually not yet mainstream.

An example of a trend would be “the climate crisis is getting worse.” It is a broad, mainstream reality. A related signal might be a news article covering a local school's inability to account for the influx of new students relocated from a nearby town after a devastating flood. That story signals the kind of conditions we might see as climate change continues to escalate and impact peoples' lives.

Signals might point to a transformation, escalation, or deescalation of what's currently happening. It can be illuminating to gather signals across different categories, including political, social, cultural, economic, environmental, technological, and more, to get a complete sense of the conditions at play.

Aim to gather 8–15 signals across different categories or contexts. These can come from:

- News articles, podcasts, or fiction
- Conversations with frontline organizers
- Personal experiences or pattern recognition
- Trends in tech, media, governance, policy, etc.

Once you have your signals, start imagining how they might evolve by your selected future date. How might one or more of these shape the conditions people are navigating in your vignettes?

3D. Identify areas of focus. Decide what four areas of focus you want to zoom into through your vignettes. Each one should offer a distinct lens on that same moment. It's a short, vivid scene unfolding in a particular context.

You might choose to focus by:

- Geography - different states, cities, or rural/urban areas
- Campaigns or movements - distinct organizing efforts or field priorities
- Roles or perspectives - different members of a coalition or levels of power (e.g., grassroots, elected, institutional)

Think of each vignette as a small piece of a larger puzzle, not telling the whole story, but revealing a unique part of it.

3E. Draft your vignettes. These are short, distinct stories that each reflect one piece of your shared future moment.

Each vignette should:

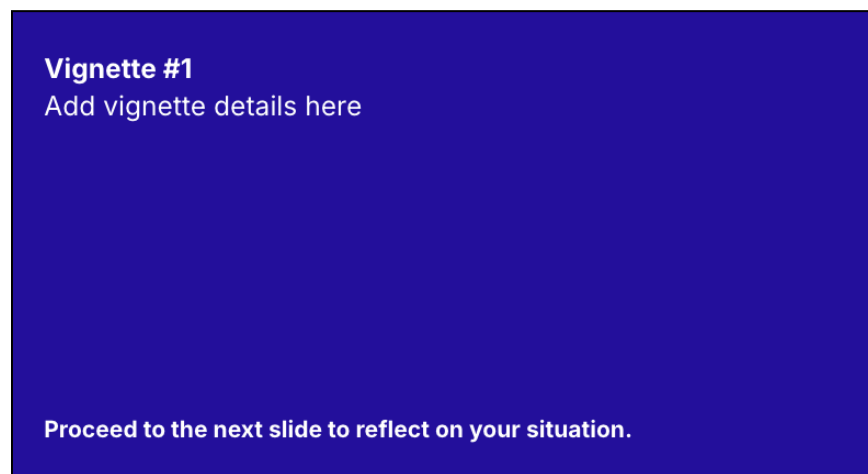
- Be set on your chosen future date
- Zoom into a specific campaign, place, coalition, or perspective
- Be short and vivid (100–200 words)
- Reflect today's signals extrapolated into the near future
- Leave room for interpretation, emotion, and response

You're not writing a comprehensive scenario, but crafting a window into one scene that sparks questions and reactions.

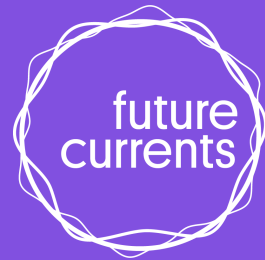
Good vignettes are:

- Plausible, not predictive: Grounded in the present, but surprising
- Emotionally resonant: They should invite participants to feel something — frustration, hope, uncertainty
- Actionable: Participants should be able to imagine what they or their organization might do in this moment

You'll pair each vignette with the same three reflection questions. These help participants quickly connect the story to their own strategic thinking and role. When your vignettes are complete, you can populate them on Slides 6, 8, 10, and 12 of the [Moment in Time deck](#):



After completing all of the above and deleting the bracketed instructions in the template, you're ready for Moment in Time!



**Scenario Thinking
in Action**

Plot Twist 2027

Stretch your imagination and practice responding to uncertainty

What is this tool?

- Plot Twist 2027 is designed to take approximately 35 minutes for individual use and 60 minutes for group use, and can easily be extended depending on your needs.
- This tool is designed to help individuals, teams, organizations, or networks entertain plausible futures and explore how strategies might persist or shift in the face of conditions outside of their control.
- Thanks to its modular and randomized format, it can be used repeatedly to generate new scenarios to grapple with.

Who are you working with?

If you're planning to use this tool independently, **find the "Individual Worksheet" in this packet!**

If you're planning to facilitate for a group, decide if you'd like participants to experience one scenario or multiple distinct scenarios.

- **One scenario:** All participants experience the same scenario that you pre-generate by selecting or randomizing conditions from the 2027 Futures Deck found in your worksheet. This approach is recommended if you're facilitating Plot Twist for the first time, if you have less than 60 minutes, or if part of your purpose for the scenario exercise is to build alignment among participants. You can break up into groups if you choose to do so. **Find the "Single Scenario Group Worksheet" in this packet.**
- **Multiple distinct scenarios:** Participants break up into groups, with each group experiencing a different scenario that you generate by selecting or randomizing conditions from the 2027 Futures Deck found in your worksheet. This approach is helpful if part of your purpose for the exercise is to pressure test your current strategy and approaches across a range of plausible future conditions. This iteration requires a minimum run time of 60 minutes to allow time at the top for groups to generate their scenarios and at the close for cross-scenario discussion. **Find the "Multi-Scenario Group Worksheet" in this packet.**

Scenario Set-Up

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through the “Scenario Exercise Primer” in this packet for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise.

Once you’ve read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group. See example below.

Purpose:

- Pressure-test current strategies by exploring how they might hold up, adapt, or fall short across a range of unexpected future conditions.
- Build collective muscle for values-based decision-making under uncertainty and develop adaptive strategic instincts.

Outcomes:

- Surface which current approaches, assumptions, or partnerships may need to be rethought in order to stay effective across multiple futures.
- Identify flexible strategies, roles, or tactics that can persist or evolve in response to distinct external shifts.

Ground Rules:

- **Don’t fight the scenario:** Scenarios are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both.
- **Use this as a sandbox:** Explore bold ideas without needing to commit.
- **Care for yourself and others:** Some futures may feel close to home. Take space if needed.

How to use this tool

1

Generate and fill in the scenario. Reference your worksheet. Either select one condition from each category in the 2027 Futures Deck in your worksheet or randomly generate your scenario using the [digital randomizer](#). Copy and paste your condition descriptions on the [next slide](#). There is also the option to develop your own future conditions for the 2027 Futures Deck to use. For more on this, consult the “Plot Twist Template” in this packet.

2

Review and confirm exercise timing. The times suggested in the worksheets allow 35 minutes for the individual and single scenario group worksheets and 60 minutes for the multi-scenario group worksheet. This is the minimum time needed, and if working in groups, we encourage you to consider building in time for group share outs during Part 3 of the exercise.

Your 2027 Scenario

If you're using the "Multi-Scenario Group Worksheet," copy this slide so that each group has their own 2027 scenario.

- **Political Context:** [insert condition description]
- **Economic Context:** [insert condition description]
- **Social & Cultural Context:** [insert condition description]
- **Seeds of Possibility:** [insert condition description]

Plot Twist 2027 Individual Worksheet

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through our [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to be an attentive and respectful participant to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to develop the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Ground in Vision & Values (5 mins)

Before exploring your 2027 scenario, take a moment to reconnect with the deeper goals and values that guide your work. This grounding step is included to encourage you to identify potential tensions or pitfalls that future uncertainty may present.

- What long term goal(s) anchor your work?
- What values guide your decision making?

Part 1: Build Your 2027 Scenario & Reflect (10 mins)

Either select one condition from each category in the 2027 Futures Deck in this packet or randomly generate your scenario using the [digital randomizer](#). Copy and paste the conditions into the slide titled **"Your 2027 Scenario."**

Read through the version of 2027 you find yourself in and take stock of what that means for you, your organization, and the movement broadly. Take a few minutes to independently reflect:

- What would it feel like to live and organize in this future?
- Who holds power in this future and how is it exercised?

Part 2: Strategic Reflection & Action Orientation (20 mins)

Use the prompts below to explore how you, your team, or your organization might navigate the future scenario you've just reviewed.

- What's one strategy, practice, or partnership that might need to change in order to stay effective?
- What is one role your organization or team might uniquely play in this landscape?
- Where do you see tension between your long-term values or goals and the realities of this future? What tradeoffs might you be forced to consider?
- What feels most at risk—for your organization, community, or movement?
- How might you build resilience or protection around that?
- What's one action, insight, or shift you want to explore now, based on this future?

Plot Twist 2027 Single Scenario Group Worksheet

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through our [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to be an attentive and respectful participant to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to develop the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Ground in Vision & Values (5 mins)

Before exploring your 2027 scenario, take a moment to reconnect with the deeper goals and values that guide your work. This grounding step is included to encourage you to identify potential tensions or pitfalls that future uncertainty may present.

- What long term goal(s) anchor your work?
- What values guide your decision making?

Part 1: Build Your 2027 Scenario & Reflect (10 mins)

Either select one condition from each category in the 2027 Futures Deck in this packet or randomly generate your scenario using the [digital randomizer](#). Copy and paste the conditions into the slide titled **"Your 2027 Scenario."**

Read through the version of 2027 you find yourself in and take stock of what that means for you, your organization, and the movement broadly. Take a few minutes to independently reflect:

- What would it feel like to live and organize in this future?
- Who holds power in this future and how is it exercised?

Part 2: Strategic Reflection & Action-Oriented (20 mins)

Use the prompts below to explore how you, your team, or your organization might navigate the future scenario you've just reviewed. If working in breakout groups, choose one notetaker and one person to report back during the full group debrief. Be prepared to share one reflection, idea, or strategic question with the broader group during the debrief.

- What's one strategy, practice, or partnership that might need to change in order to stay effective?
- What is one role your organization or team might uniquely play in this landscape?
- Where do you see tension between your long-term values or goals and the realities of this future? What tradeoffs might you be forced to consider?
- What feels most at risk—for your organization, community, or movement?
- How might you build resilience or protection around that?
- What's one action, insight, or shift you want to explore now, based on this future?

Part 3: Optional Full Group Share Out (10+ mins)

If working in breakout groups, reconvene the full group for a debrief.

- Have each group share one reflection, idea, or strategic question with the broader group during the debrief.

Plot Twist 2027 Multi-Scenario Group Worksheet

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through our [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to be an attentive and respectful participant to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to develop the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Ground in Vision & Values (5 mins)

Before exploring your 2027 scenario, take a moment to reconnect with the deeper goals and values that guide your work. This grounding step is included to encourage you to identify potential tensions or pitfalls that future uncertainty may present.

- What long term goal(s) anchor your work?
- What values guide your decision making?

Part I: Build Your 2027 Scenario & Reflect (10 mins)

Either select one condition from each category in the 2027 Futures Deck in this packet or randomly generate your scenario using the [digital randomizer](#). Copy and paste the conditions into the slide titled **"Your 2027 Scenario."** Make sure each group has their own designated slide to place their unique scenario.

Read through the version of 2027 you find yourself in and take stock of what that means for you, your organization, and the movement broadly. Take a few minutes to independently reflect:

- What would it feel like to live and organize in this future?
- Who holds power in this future and how is it exercised?

Part 2: Strategic Reflection & Action-Orientation (20 mins)

Use the prompts below to explore how you, your team, or your organization might navigate the future scenario you've just reviewed. Choose one notetaker and one person to report back during the full group debrief. Be prepared to share one reflection, idea, or strategic question with the broader group during the debrief.

- What's one strategy, practice, or partnership that might need to change in order to stay effective?
- What is one role your organization or team might uniquely play in this landscape?
- Where do you see tension between your long-term values or goals and the realities of this future? What tradeoffs might you be forced to consider?
- What feels most at risk—for your organization, community, or movement?
- How might you build resilience or protection around that?
- What's one action, insight, or shift you want to explore now, based on this future?

Part 3: Share Out & Whole Group Discussion (20+ mins)

Once breakout group discussions are complete, come back together as a full group. Each breakout group will briefly share reflection using the following structure.

- **Scenario recap (1-2 minutes):** Nominate someone to briefly describe the future scenario your group explored. Summarize the key dynamics and any big takeaways.
- **Strategic Reflection Share (1-2 minutes):** Share your group's response to the final reflection prompt:
 - What's one action, insight, or shift you want to explore now, based on this future?

Group-wide Discussion:

- What strategies, roles, or partnerships can flex across multiple futures? What feels rigid or vulnerable?

2027 Futures Deck

Political Context

Unchecked Executive Power

Unchecked Executive Power: In 2027, the executive branch governs almost entirely through emergency declarations and “foreign affairs exemptions,” routinely bypassing Congressional and judicial checks. Entire policy areas, including energy production, immigration, and policing, are managed by executive order carried out by loyalist appointees. Several governors have defied mandates, but been brought to heel by funding cuts, targeted criminal investigations, media smear campaigns, and detention carried out at the direction of the Office of the President.

Criminalization of Dissent

Criminalization of Dissent: Passed in 2026, the Preventing Radical Organizing and Terrorism Expansion in Crucial Times (PROTECT) Act redefined protest as a threat to national infrastructure and security. Under this law, traditional protest tactics like mass occupation, transportation blockades, and digital disruption are tied to domestic extremism and classified as felonies. Organizers and others affiliated with climate justice, labor, immigrant rights, and racial justice movements, as well as with international solidarity movements, are being prosecuted as foreign-influenced agents.

Rise of Authoritarian Federalism

Rise of Authoritarian Federalism: States now operate more like competing political regimes than collaborators in a unified country. Bordering red and blue states have begun to erect both physical and digital checkpoints, screening entrants for protest history, vaccine records, and activist group activity. Texas and Florida residents are required to sign state loyalty pledges to access public services. Meanwhile, Illinois and Massachusetts operate programs to support and resettle political refugees from hostile jurisdictions. Cross-state migration has surged, with those partaking citing personal safety, education programming, or the need for access to restricted medical care as primary drivers. At the same time, conservative families are relocating into red states in pursuit of expansive gun rights, opt-out clauses from public health mandates, and school systems aligned with Christian nationalist values. Migration is no longer simply economic, but also a strategy for ideological self-sorting in an increasingly fragmented nation.

Collapsing Election Infrastructure

Collapsing Election Infrastructure: Some states have begun mandating biometric facial recognition to confirm eligibility, resulting in the disproportionate disqualification of broad swaths of Latino and Black voters. Turnout among young people and voters of color has dropped dramatically due to active disenfranchisement and erosion of trust. Precontesting the election results months before any votes are cast has become a standard procedure in contested races in red and purple states.

Deputization of Paramilitary Forces

Deputization of Paramilitary Forces: Armed civilian groups, officially deputized by the federal government and certain state governments, are now a visible presence at polling stations, immigration raids, and protests. Calling themselves “community defense forces,” they function as instruments of intimidation, especially targeting communities of color, journalists, and pro-democracy activists.

2027 Futures Deck

Economic Context

Recession and Deportation Economics

Recession and Deportation Economics: By 2027, the compounded effect of mass deportations and the resulting fear and intimidation has hollowed out industries such as agriculture, construction, and care work. Towns that once depended on migrant labor to sustain local economies are now experiencing severe labor shortages, leading to business closures, sharp increases in unemployment, and disruptions in food production that have triggered growing food insecurity. State governments are attempting to recruit prison labor and companies are exploring AI substitutes to fill the gaps, but neither solution has been able to rise to the challenge. Though informal economies are springing up to meet basic needs, local authorities are criminalizing them under anti-trafficking and tax-evasion laws, further exacerbating community destabilization.

Federal Workforce Collapse

Federal Workforce Collapse: In anticipation of the full implementation of 2025's One Big Beautiful Bill, which Republicans in Congress used to pass enormous cuts to Medicaid and SNAP, staff at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid and USDA have been cut by 55%. Without federal staffing capacity, the federal government contracts with Nexor Civic to manage the final stages of implementation, shifting the administration of Medicaid and SNAP to states. Nexor is encouraging state governments to implement biometric IDs and algorithmic eligibility scoring for these and other safety net programs. In areas hit especially hard by the One Big Beautiful Bill cuts, particularly rural counties and historically disinvested urban zones, informal mutual aid networks and underfunded nonprofits are trying to fill service provision needs, but are completely overwhelmed by both the volume and variety of needs.

Insurance Market Exit

Insurance Market Exit: Traditional insurance companies have withdrawn from over 20% of U.S. counties, driven by escalating wildfire zones, inland hurricanes, and year-round heat emergencies. State-run insurance programs, once a fragile stopgap in place like California, Louisiana, and Florida, have collapsed under sustained losses and federal divestment. In the absence of property insurance, hundreds of thousands of middle-income homeowners have fallen into mortgage default. With insurance required to maintain most home loans, foreclosures have surged, and properties are rapidly transferred to private equity firms, institutional landlords, and corporate investors via bulk auctions. Wealthy households, largely unaffected due to owning their homes outright, continue to hold and acquire climate-resilient properties.

Corporate Capture of Social Services

Corporate Capture of Social Services: Over 40 city governments have signed contracts with major corporations to create Corporate Governance Zones, where companies like Rain Municipal and Syntra Public Services offer housing, transit, and utilities assistance in exchange for continuous data provision and adherence to strict behavioral terms of service. Residents who default on their contracts lose access to these essential services. These "private governance" systems are touted as efficient alternatives, but raise significant concerns over surveillance and coercive dependency.

Automation Displaces Low- Wage Labor

Automation Displaces Low-Wage Labor: Large companies like Rain and Zyft are employing automation and predictive workforce modeling to make job assignments by AI-generated "labor fit" scores. AI software sets work schedules for tens of thousands of workers based on location, past performance, biometric data, and perceived political activism. This created unpredictable working conditions for thousands of people who aren't sure from week to week where they'll be expected to work, let alone how many hours they'll be scheduled for. And many of these low-wage workers are assigned to shifts with no single employer of record, functionally turning them into gig workers.

2027 Futures Deck

Social & Cultural Context

Fragmented Education = Fragmented Truths

Fragmented Education = Fragmented Truths: In 2027, the ideological divide in K-12 education has solidified into two incompatible national curricula. In federally aligned districts, “American Greatness” and 1776 Project curricula emphasize order, nationalism, and Christian values. Instruction on topics like the theory of evolution, the impacts of human activity on the climate, and the histories of Native and enslaved peoples have been eliminated. In contrast, school systems in a handful of well-resourced “resistance” states like California, New York, and Massachusetts face escalating federal retaliation for continuing to teach these topics. The federal government recently announced a partnership with two charter school networks that use the American Greatness program to dramatically expand their funding and reach in these states, hoping to “finally end the stranglehold of failed woke indoctrination” in Blue states.

Restricted Rights to Assemble

Restricted Rights to Assemble: In 2027, the right to assemble has been sharply curtailed through a web of biometric permit systems, surveillance infrastructure, and vague public order statutes. In dozens of jurisdictions, gatherings of more than ten people require advanced registration, facial recognition scans, and pre-approved agendas. Public parks, transit hubs, and even libraries are now categorized as “restricted congregation zones,” regularly monitored by drones and roving federal law enforcement task force groups operating out of ICE. While traditional protests have become harder to organize, movement leaders have adapted by shifting tactics. Drawing on histories of disbursed noncooperation, activists stage rolling sick-outs, coordinated consumer boycotts, and flash gatherings. Resistance looks different, but is no less potent.

Rise of Parallel Cultural Ecosystems

Rise of Parallel Cultural Ecosystems: Marginalized communities and movement artists have established their own resilient media and cultural systems, using paper ‘zines, ham radio, and other throwback tools to route around the suppression of algorithms and mainstream gatekeeping on corporate platforms. The 2027 “People’s Arts Census”, an independent survey of decentralized cultural production, captured over 11,000 community-led arts, educational, and publishing projects spanning 41 states. However, these nascent ecosystems are in constant flux, facing the threat of digital deplatforming, funding scarcity, and targeted government attacks.

Hyper-Local Community Identity

Hyper-Local Community Identity: In 2027, national cohesion has fractured into thousands of hyper-localized strongholds, each shaped by its own history and ideological leanings. In many areas, communities have withdrawn from broader networks altogether, operating their own emergency response teams and homeschool co-ops. In some places, what began as grassroots resilience has morphed into localized gatekeeping where newcomers are asked to prove lineage or loyalty before being allowed access to shared services. Communication across communities is challenging. Organizers moving between zones have been known to be turned away or detained. Even neighboring towns with similar values may forgo coordination, citing fear of betrayal or infiltration.

Youth Drift Rightward

Youth Drift Rightward: A significant faction of Gen Z has been radicalized rightward, encouraged by organized propaganda efforts and platform algorithms. High schools have seen the rise of youth-led groups like “TradCore,” which advocate for a white nationalist agenda of gender essentialism, military service, and cultural purity. Members participate in tactical military training hosted at private summer camps or by VR-enabled simulators. According to a 2027 Pew Youth poll, 37% of Gen Z respondents identify with “strong-nationalist” values, up from 13% five years earlier. A countermovement of radical left youth deepens its commitment to mutual aid, non-traditional family structures, and shared governance models.

2027 Futures Deck

Seeds of Possibility

Red-State Democracy Experiments

Red-State Democracy Experiments: Despite a hostile federal climate, several communities in conservative towns across the Midwest and Southeast have launched “shadow sociocracy” pilots hosted in farming co-ops, kitchen-table circles, and Bible studies. These hyper-local efforts at a radically participatory structure for shared decision making include participatory budgeting processes and public resource mapping. In 2027, more than 15 towns across three states have successfully used these models to fund local housing trusts and revamp school curricula.

Black and Indigenous Land-Back Models Scale

Black and Indigenous Land-Back Models Scale: In the face of federal rollbacks, tribal nations have deepened partnerships with universities, climate nonprofits, and local governments to reclaim or co-govern land. In 2027, the Inter-Tribal Stewardship Compact in the Pacific Northwest took collective responsibility for 92,000 acres of fire-prone forestland, using Indigenous tradition and labor to restore ecosystems abandoned by federal agencies. Meanwhile, the LandBack4Liberation coalition, led by Black and Indigenous organizers in North Carolina and New Mexico, has partnered with local governments to pilot a land ownership and housing model that replaces private ownership with community stewardship rooted in shared responsibility and self-determination.

Mutual Aid Networks Become Political Infrastructure

Mutual Aid Networks Become Political Infrastructure: Mutual aid networks that grew in communities across the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to climate disasters have become localized civic institutions. By 2027, they have become standing infrastructure, coordinating a broad array of services from public health clinics to neighbor-led disaster response and increasingly outperforming government services. Some municipal councils now formally contract mutual aid networks for essential services. While many see this as a democratic innovation, others are concerned that local governments are increasingly outsourcing core responsibilities without guaranteeing sustained public investment or oversight.

Civic Rituals Reclaim Meaning

Civic Rituals Reclaim Meaning: By 2027, movements have reclaimed cultural and civic space through ritual as a form of political practice. In Atlanta, remembrance circles honoring lives lost to incarceration and state violence combine gospel music, prayer, and demands for policy change. In Minneapolis, an annual ritual called “The Remembrance” transforms a former police precinct into a site of ceremony, featuring restorative justice and community care. Across the country, ceremonies now mark shared grief, hurricane season preparation, and anniversary vigils for landmark court decisions like the fall of *Roe v. Wade*. Organizers are working to bring attendees of these gatherings into more formal networks, hoping to engage in collective strategy, emotional grounding, and community accountability with people alienated by the absence of responsive public institutions and looking for community support.

Plot Twist Template [Instructions]

Before beginning to develop your Plot Twist tool, you may want to read through [scenario exercise primer](#) for background on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise.

The Plot Twist scenario tool is a modular, repeatable exercise designed to help you stress-test strategies under a range of future conditions beyond your control. It works well as a facilitated workshop, a small group exercise, or a solo reflection tool, and uses either a digital scrambler or printed cards to generate randomized scenarios.

Participants, or the facilitator if done in advance, draw one condition from each of four categories – political context, economic context, social and cultural context, and seeds of possibility – to construct a unique plausible future. Through reflection and discussion, participants then explore how their strategies might hold up, fall short, or need to be adapted in these contexts.

The exercise run-time typically takes 30–45 minutes, but can be shortened to 15–20 minutes for solo use or scaled up to 60–90 minutes including debriefs for a workshop or other group setting.

We recommend allowing 2-4 hours to build a robust Plot Twist exercise from the ground up. If you are already regularly engaged in signals chasing, a key part of the scenario building process that we'll discuss in detail in this guide, a Plot Twist exercise could be developed in 90 minutes.

How to Build a Plot Twist Exercise

Building your own Plot Twist exercise has three steps. First, determine the purpose, participants, and process for your scenario. Then, develop the reflection questions and strategic prompts for your discussion. And finally, craft the scenario components you want participants to experience. Here is a simple checklist condensing all of the steps for ease of review, with a detailed step-by-step process outlined below.

Determine the purpose, participants, and process for your scenario

- ☐ Establish your purpose and outcomes
- ☐ Determine who will participate
- ☐ Set ground rules
- ☐ Set a time duration for your scenario

Develop the strategic questions or prompts for your discussion

- ☐ Consider your purpose, as well as the experience and dynamics of your group
- ☐ Draft emotional inoculation questions
- ☐ Draft strategic adjustment questions
- ☐ Draft action oriented questions

Develop the conditions

- ☐ Identify pivot points
- ☐ Set your time horizon
- ☐ Develop conditions for each category (political, economic, social/cultural, seeds of hope) using signals and trends
- ☐ Color in the details and flesh out each condition

1. Determining the purpose, participants, and process

1A. Customize your purpose and outcomes. For this short activity, suggested purpose and outcomes have been pre-populated, but you may wish to edit or add to them. The purpose is why you or your group are engaging in scenario thinking. The outcomes reflect what you hope to gain by engaging in scenario thinking. To help keep the exercise focused and to be realistic about what we can achieve, we typically set 2-3 goals for purpose and 2-3 desired outcomes.

If you would like to edit or add your own items under Purpose and Outcomes, you will add them in the template:

Plot Twist [Template]

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

<p>Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure-test current strategies by exploring how they might hold up, adapt, or fall short across a range of unexpected future conditions. • Create space for strategic creativity and resilience by navigating volatile, plausible futures outside of participants' control. • Build collective muscle for values-based decision-making under uncertainty and develop adaptive strategic instincts. <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surface which current approaches, assumptions, or partnerships may need to be rethought in order to stay effective across multiple futures. • Clarify where investments in people, narrative, or infrastructure are most needed
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1B. Determine who will participate in your scenario. In fact, you may know this even before you've clarified your purpose and outcomes. For instance, you may be asked to lead scenario planning for a staff meeting or a member education session. If you are deciding on participants in your process, let your purpose and outcomes guide who you

invite. Each person should be invited because they are needed to accomplish your goals in the meeting and in the work you will do coming out of the meeting.

In either case your decisions about purpose and participants will mutually shape each other. Reflect on how *that group* will fulfill *the purpose* of the scenario exercise. It's important to pay attention to the dynamics and tensions within the group you're convening and carry that knowledge forward as you craft key questions to surface.

1C. Confirm your ground rules. For this short activity, suggested ground rules have been pre-populated, but you may wish to edit or add to them for the particular dynamics of your group.

Feel free to add to this list of ground rules to fit your group's needs and enter your ground rules into the template:

Ground Rules:

- **Don't fight the scenario:** Scenarios are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both;
- **Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting:** When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas. People should have the space to share initial ideas (even if they're not fully fleshed out) and bolder strategic thinking without worrying they are committing to any specific work.

1D. Set the time and format for your scenario. A typical Plot Twist session runs 30–45 minutes, but the structure is flexible. Choose the format that best suits your time and group:

- Solo: 30 minutes to generate the scenario conditions, reflect, and journal
- Small group: 30–45 minutes to generate a shared scenario and reflect together
- Workshop: 45–90 minutes to run multiple groups with a full-group debrief

You can choose to generate one shared scenario or have each group generate a unique scenario. For first-time users, we recommend starting with one shared scenario to get familiar with the tool.

2. Developing strategic questions or prompts

To craft prompts that surface key themes and understanding that will inform your work, reference your purpose and outcomes, and keep in mind the dynamics and experiences of your audience.

Scenario planning kickstarts further strategy development. As you develop your prompts, consider what will help you understand where your participants currently are, what you

need in order to prepare for the future, and what key inputs you want for developing a comprehensive action plan after the exercise.

We recommend developing three types of questions to guide reflection and discussion on the full scenario – reflection questions, strategic assessment questions, and action-oriented questions. While it can be tempting to include many prompts, we suggest choosing one to two strong questions from each category to keep the exercise focused and manageable for a 30–45 minute session.

- **Reflection Questions:** These questions help participants pause and take stock of how the scenario feels. They're designed to surface emotional and intuitive responses, including surprise, discomfort, resonance, or curiosity, and to help participants locate themselves in the imagined future.
 - i. Examples: What condition in this scenario caught you most off guard and why? What emotions are you noticing as you imagine living or organizing in this future?
- **Strategy Assessment Questions:** Next, you can move participants into strategic reflection. These questions shift the focus to how your current strategies interact with the scenario. They ask participants to examine what's still effective, what needs to shift, and what your blind spots might be. This is where you evaluate strengths, vulnerabilities, and potential leverage points under pressure.
 - i. Examples: Which parts of your current strategy would need to adapt and how quickly could they? What risks emerge that your current plans don't account for? Where in this future might your power be growing and where might it be at risk?
- **Action-Oriented Questions :** And finally, you can engage participants in questions that are action-oriented. These questions begin to move you from reflection and insight to next steps. Without locking into a rigid plan, they invite you to explore how you might begin preparing for futures like this one, by investing in relationships, adjusting tactics, or building internal capacity.
 - i. Examples: What infrastructure would you need in place today to be ready for this future? What relationships would you want to strengthen to navigate this kind of scenario? What's one area where you could build more strategic flexibility or resilience right now?

When you have your discussion prompts, you can populate them in the template:

Part 2: Initial Reactions [10 mins]

Read through the scenario conditions and take stock of the future you find yourself in. We encourage you to take a few minutes to individually jot down your first impressions and responses to the questions below. Then reconvene as a group and spend 5-10 minutes sharing out.

[insert reflection questions]

Part 3: Strategic Reflection & Action-Orientation [15+ mins]

Use the following prompts to explore how you, your team, or your organization might navigate this future. If working in breakout groups, identify one notetaker and one person to give a readout to the full group.

[insert strategic reflection questions and action-orientation prompts]

3. Crafting the scenario

Craft the conditions that will comprise your scenario—your narrative of the possible future you want your group to engage—using these steps:

- Identify pivot points
- Set your time horizon
- Develop conditions using signals and trends
- Connect the conditions and color in the details

3A. Identify pivot points. Pivot points are significant political, social, and cultural events on the horizon or significant changes in conditions that present crisis or opportunity moments that are critical to engage. For example, a pivot point could be a union contract fight, an election, a pandemic, a tropical storm or tornado, or a new executive order or law.

You will likely be considering a primary pivot point as you identify the need for a scenario exercise in the first place. For example, you might be preparing for a potential governing moment, a significant cultural event, or a Supreme Court decision. But there are many others that also will impact the conditions in which you are fighting. To identify the right pivot points to include in your scenario, consider what events on the horizon or changing conditions are critical moments to build power and meet your desired outcomes. A few key pivot points will anchor your scenario.

3B. Set your time horizon. To determine the right time horizon, consider what will help your participants achieve the outcomes most effectively. It can be helpful to put the time horizon after the main pivot point you are preparing for to help you play out how conditions develop in different outcomes and to prepare to meet future conditions regardless of the outcome.

For example, a group looking to prepare for the post-2026 election governing moment might put their time horizon in 2027 to strategize about how to prepare for various outcomes. Another group planning to work on the 2030 Census might choose the 2028 census pilots as their pivot point and situate their scenario in 2029, between the pilots and the 2030 Census.

3C. Develop conditions using signals and trends. To develop a strong Futures Deck for your Plot Twist exercise, start by exploring current signals and trends that can shape plausible futures. Plot Twist includes four key categories of conditions:

- Political Context
- Economic Context
- Social & Cultural Context
- Seeds of Possibility (bright spots that give us hope)

You'll want to look for signals and trends across the four categories. Signals are early signs of change, showing us how the future might be different from the present. It's important to understand the difference between signals and trends and employ both in developing conditions.

Trends are patterns of change that are already largely visible and mainstream. They represent broad shifts that are happening over time. Signals are more specific, often surprising examples that hint at these larger shifts before they become obvious. They are current, concrete, and usually not yet mainstream.

An example of a trend would be "the climate crisis is getting worse." It is a broad, mainstream reality. A related signal might be a news article covering a local school's inability to account for the influx of new students relocated from a nearby town after a devastating flood. That story signals the kind of conditions we might see as climate change continues to escalate and impact peoples' lives.

Signals might point to a transformation, escalation, or deescalation of what's currently happening. It can be illuminating to gather signals across different categories, including political, social, cultural, economic, environmental, technological, and more, to get a complete sense of the conditions at play.

Aim to gather 5-10 signals per category. These can come from:

- News articles, podcasts, fiction
- Conversations with frontline organizers
- Personal experiences or pattern recognition
- Trends in tech, media, governance, policy, etc.

Once you have your signals, start imagining how they might evolve by your selected future date. How might one or more of these shape the conditions people are navigating in your vignettes?

3D. Draft your condition cards. Convert the signals into condition cards for each of the 4 categories. Each card should briefly describe a plausible development in whatever future point you've selected, grounded in the signals or trends you identified. Each card should:

- Be set in your selected time horizon (2028, 2030, etc)
- Zoom into a specific campaign, place, coalition, or perspective
- Be short and vivid (3-5 sentences)
- Be specific and plausible
- Pose a challenge, shift, or opportunity folks would need to respond to

When drafting, ensure that each condition invites questions, not specific answers. The goal is to create scenarios that provoke reflection, uncertainty, and the need for strategic response.

Once all your cards are written, they're ready to be added to the Future Deck template. If you'd like to use the digital randomizer, consult the directions [here](#) to set it up or you can print the cards and randomize by hand.

Futures Deck

Political Context

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition

Economic Context

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition

Plot Twist [Template]

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Purpose:

- Pressure-test current strategies by exploring how they might hold up, adapt, or fall short across a range of unexpected future conditions.
- Create space for strategic creativity and resilience by navigating volatile, plausible futures outside of participants' control.
- Build collective muscle for values-based decision-making under uncertainty and develop adaptive strategic instincts.

Outcomes:

- Surface which current approaches, assumptions, or partnerships may need to be rethought in order to stay effective across multiple futures.
- Clarify where investments in people, narrative, or infrastructure are most needed to remain grounded and strategic through disruption.
- Identify flexible strategies, roles, or tactics that can persist or evolve in response to distinct external shifts.

Ground Rules:

- **Don't fight the scenario:** Scenarios are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both;
- **Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting:** When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas. People should have the space to share initial ideas (even if they're not fully fleshed out) and bolder strategic thinking without worrying they are committing to any specific work.





Directions

This exercise is designed to take at least 30 minutes, but can be adjusted to meet your time constraints and group size.

Part 1: Build Your Scenario [5 mins]

Use the digital scrambler to randomly select one condition from each of the four categories to generate your group's shared scenario. Open the Futures Deck, find the

condition title listed in the scrambler and copy and paste the full description into the table below. Repeat for each category. This is the scenario you will use for the remainder of the exercise.

Category	Scenario Condition
 Political Context	
 Economic Context	
 Social & Cultural Context	
 Seed of Possibility	

Part 2: Initial Reactions [10 mins]

Read through the scenario conditions and take stock of the future you find yourself in. We encourage you to take a few minutes to individually jot down your first impressions and responses to the questions below. Then reconvene as a group and spend 5-10 minutes sharing out.

[insert reflection questions]

Part 3: Strategic Reflection & Action-Orientation [15+ mins]

Use the following prompts to explore how you, your team, or your organization might navigate this future. If working in breakout groups, identify one notetaker and one person to give a readout to the full group.

[insert strategic reflection questions and action-orientation prompts]

Futures Deck

Political Context

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition

Economic Context

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition

Social and Cultural Context

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition

Seeds of Possibility

Insert Condition Title here	Insert 100-200 word description of the condition



**Scenario Thinking
in Action**

Reflect, Discuss, Act: Spring 2028

Directions

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through our [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to be an attentive and respectful participant to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to develop the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group. See examples below.

Purpose

- Expose participants to plausible future political, social, and cultural conditions.
- Cultivate a creative space for participants to assess their current strategies and the posture needed to face future challenges and opportunities.

Outcomes

- Assess relationships you need to cultivate or strengthen to meet future conditions.
- Understand how to shift priorities given potential opportunities and threats.

Ground Rules

- **Don't fight the scenario:** Scenarios are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both.
- **Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting:** When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas without worrying about committing to any specific work.

This exercise is designed to take at least an hour, but can be adjusted to meet your time constraints and group size.

1 Read through the short scenario (5 min). If you're working in a group, appoint someone to read it aloud. As you read or listen, feel free to jot down notes about what stands out to you and any immediate reactions you have to the future being described.

2 After reading through the scenario, fill out the template solo or with your team.

- **Reflect (10 min)** to examine the political, social, and cultural landscape in this future. Metabolize and name how you're feeling about this future. Surface concerns, bright spots, and questions about your (and your organization's, network's, and community's) place in this future.
- **Discuss (20 min)** to brainstorm how you can shape your (and your organization's, network's, and community's) actions today to better meet or change future conditions.
- **Act (25 min)** to inform a concrete plan for how to incorporate your reflections into your work. How can this conversation kickstart necessary steps to build new strategies, make shifts in priorities, or develop needed infrastructure?

Now let's travel to the spring of 2028...

The rainy season in Missouri has been historic with severe flash flooding in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Springfield. Firefighters, EMTs, and police officers are voicing concerns about outdated and defective equipment ahead of the rainy weather expected during the summer months. Unable to negotiate for better working conditions and equipment due to the legislature vacating collective bargaining rights for public sector unions, first responders fear more injuries and deaths this summer due to a lack of adequate resources.

Private companies across the manufacturing and construction industries have ramped up retaliation against union activists and supporters, knowing that their unfair labor practices will go unpunished by the emaciated NLRB. During a rally led by construction workers on strike in Edinburg, Texas, an armed militia member killed two workers who were on strike and injured several others. Local law enforcement's initial investigation has found that the perpetrator expressed anti-union and white christian nationalist sentiments on social media platforms including Truth Social and X.

Public and private sector unions are ramping up public education campaigns to highlight the importance of collective bargaining to improve benefits and conditions, and advocate for workers' rights in general. These campaigns have been especially important for public sector union members who are seeking to put a measure on their states' upcoming ballot to repeal collective bargaining bans. In Ohio, one of the states to have already collected enough signatures, a group of state representatives has launched an effort to label the success "petition fraud" and introduced legislation to increase the number of signatures required to get issues onto the ballot. A coalition of far-right groups held a rally against the petition process in Columbus, claiming that only "native-born Americans" should be qualified for signing petitions. Counter-protestors were targeted by local law enforcement and nearly fifty union members were arrested.

In February of this year, a federal Department of Labor issued a rule characterizing any coordination of strikes across more than one bargaining unit as criminal. Organizers of the May Day general strike (and others) have filed legal challenges to the arbitrary rule change, but the courts have refused to enjoin the change.

Unions and movement organizations are using the restrictions and harassment as an opportunity to build solidarity across movements leading up to the general strike. Unions and state and local movement organizations are developing coordinated contract and narrative change campaigns around shared themes to prepare for the upcoming negotiations. Collaborations of unions and movement organizations across the country are learning from each other's successes and failures through a new network that connects union-movement organization collaborations. Labor, social, racial, and climate justice advocates are using this new network to launch a pro-labor public education campaign leading up to the 2028 presidential election.

Reflect, Discuss, Act

Reflect (10 min)

What about the scenario concerns you?
What about the scenario gives you hope?
Where do you see yourself in this future? What might you be doing, thinking, feeling?

Discuss (20 min)

What challenges and opportunities do you see for your organization, network, and/or the field at large?

What will be an obstacle to building alignment among labor and movement organizations focused on social, racial, and climate justice in these future conditions?

What are the unexpected opportunities to collaborate more effectively across these groups?

Knowing this is the spring of 2028, what can and should you be doing today to meet the future conditions outside of your control:

- What are the crisis and opportunity moments that can advance lasting change?
- How can you transform the restrictions and harassment union members are facing into an opportunity to build power?
- As the labor movement and the field at large face increased harassment and threats, what structures do you need to implement to foster protection and security?

Act (25 min)

What are your initial thoughts on how to create, shore up, or abandon resources to be prepared to meet this future and/or change conditions within your control? (Be specific!)

- How might you strategically shift your priorities to meet and/or change future conditions?
- How can you engage actors within and outside your circle to advance the priorities of labor and social movements together?
- How can you better define the division of roles within your organization/network to maintain clarity and alignment?
- How can you develop mechanisms to coordinate and leverage each other's resources and capacities?

Want to take it further?

We hope this activity is helpful to you and your organization/network to strategize to better meet and change future conditions.

Want to make your own? Find the “Reflect, Discuss, Act Template” in this packet to do just that. If you’re interested in sharing your reflections, or need support using or adapting our scenario planning tools, please fill out this [google form](#) to sign up for Future Currents’ Scenario Office Hours.

Thank you!

Reflect, Discuss, Act Template [Instructions]

Prior to beginning drafting this scenario exercise, you may want to read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise.

The Reflect, Discuss, Act scenario tool is very flexible. It can be used by individuals or groups, though groups of more than 15-20 people should consider breaking into smaller groups for discussion. Both the scenario content and the conversation prompts can be scaled up or down to fit various time constraints—a shorter scenario and more focused list of discussion questions could be completed in 30 minutes, though the tool lends itself well to a meatier scenario and more lengthy strategic conversation as well.

How to Build a Reflect, Discuss, Act Exercise

Drafting a Reflect, Discuss, Act exercise has three parts. First, determine the purpose, participants, and process for your scenario. Then, develop the strategic questions or prompts for your discussion. And finally, craft the scenario itself. Below, there are step-by-step instructions for drafting your own Reflect, Discuss, Act exercise. We recommend allowing 3-5 hours to build this exercise from the ground up. If you are already regularly engaged in signals chasing, a key part of the scenario building process that we'll discuss in detail in this guide, the exercise could be developed in 2-3 hours. Here is a simple checklist condensing all the steps for ease of review:

Determine the purpose, participants, and process for your scenario

- ☐ Establish your purpose and outcomes
- ☐ Determine who will participate
- ☐ Set ground rules
- ☐ Set a time duration for your scenario

Develop the strategic questions or prompts for your discussion

- ☐ Consider your purpose, as well as the experience and dynamics of your group
- ☐ Draft 'Reflect' questions
- ☐ Draft 'Discuss' questions
- ☐ Draft 'Act' questions

Craft the scenario

- ☐ Identify pivot points
- ☐ Set your time horizon
- ☐ Develop conditions using signals and trends

- ☐ Connect the conditions and color in the details

1. Determining the purpose, participants, and process

1A. Establish your purpose and outcomes. Suggested purposes and outcomes have been pre-populated but you may wish to edit or add to them. The purpose should state why you, your organization, network, etc. are engaging in scenario thinking. And the outcomes reflect what you hope to gain by engaging in scenario thinking. To help keep the exercise focused and to be realistic about what we can achieve, we typically set 2-3 goals for purpose and 2-3 desired outcomes.

If you would like to edit or add your own items under Purpose and Outcomes, you will add them in the template:

Reflect, Discuss, Act [Template]

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Purpose:

- Expose participants to plausible future political, social, and cultural conditions.
- Cultivate a creative space for participants to assess their current strategies and the posture needed to face future challenges and opportunities.

Outcomes:

- Assess relationships you need to cultivate or strengthen to meet future conditions.
- Understand how to shift priorities given potential opportunities and threats.

1B. Determine who will participate in your scenario. In fact, you may know this even before you've clarified your purpose and outcomes. For instance, you may be asked to lead scenario planning for a staff meeting or a member education session. If you are deciding on participants in your process, let your purpose and outcomes guide who you invite. Each person should be invited because they are needed to accomplish your goals in the meeting and in the work you will do coming out of the meeting.

In either case, your decisions about purpose and participants will mutually shape each other. Reflect on how that group will fulfill the purpose of the scenario exercise. It's important to pay attention to the dynamics and tensions within the group you're convening and carry that knowledge forward as you craft key questions to surface.

1C. Set ground rules. Suggested ground rules have been pre-populated, but you may wish to edit or add to them for the particular dynamics of your group.

Scenario exercises can offer an experimental, but sometimes uncomfortable space to strategize as you face future conditions that may be challenging. We provide a set of ground rules to help participants be as fully present and comfortable as they can during these exercises. You may have ground rules your folks are already familiar with and it's fine to use those.

If you would like to edit or add your own ground rules, enter them into the template:

<p>Ground Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't fight the scenario: These conditions are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both.• Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting: When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas. People should have the space to share their initial ideas and bolder strategic thinking without worrying they are committing to any specific work.
<p>Directions</p> <p>This exercise is designed to take at least an hour, but can be adjusted to meet your time constraints and group size.</p>

1D. Finally, set the time for your scenario. The template allows for an hour to complete the scenario. If you have more or less time, adjust the time allocations in the template accordingly.

2. Developing strategic questions or prompts

Craft discussion questions to surface key themes and understandings that will inform your work. To do this, reference your purpose and outcomes, and keep in mind the dynamics and experiences of your audience.

Scenario planning kickstarts further strategy development. As you develop your prompts, consider what will help you understand where your participants currently are, what you need in order to prepare for the future, and what key inputs you want for developing a comprehensive action plan after the exercise.

This tool groups questions in three areas: reflect, discuss, act.

1. **Reflect:** After confronting the future conditions, it's helpful to examine and metabolize how you're feeling about the future being described. These questions should unearth what concerns or hopes are surfaced by the conditions presented. They invite participants to consider what they themselves are doing and feeling in this future.
 - Examples: What about the scenario concerns you? What about the scenario gives you hope? Where do you see yourself in this future? What might you be doing, thinking, feeling?

2. **Discuss:** Next, you can move participants into strategic reflection. These questions should explore how the future conditions presented may alter the landscape of challenges and opportunities presented and whether current approaches, strategies, and partnerships are the “right” response or need refinement to better meet the moment.
 - Examples: What challenges and opportunities do you see for your organization, network, and/or the field at large in this future? What will be an obstacle to achieving your goals in these future conditions? What are the unexpected opportunities to collaborate more effectively with partners?
3. **Act:** And finally, you can engage participants in questions that are action-oriented. A scenario isn’t the right vehicle to develop a step-by-step workplan, but it’s a critical opportunity to think about how you want to begin planning. These are questions that ask people to consider practical realities like relationships, resources, capacities, and workplans.
 - Examples: What are your initial thoughts on how to create, shore up, or abandon resources to be prepared to meet this future and/or change conditions within your control? How might you strategically shift your priorities to meet and/or change future conditions? How can you better define the division of roles within your organization/network to maintain clarity and alignment?
 -

When you have your discussion prompts, you can populate them in the template:

Reflect, Discuss, Act [customize questions]	
Reflect (10 min)	
Discuss (20 min)	
Act (25 min)	<input type="text"/>

3. Crafting the scenario

With your purpose, participants, process, and prompts locked down, you’ll begin crafting the scenario—your narrative of the possible future you want your group to engage—using these steps:

- Identify pivot points
- Set your time horizon
- Develop conditions using signals and trends
- Connect the conditions and color in the details

3A. Identify pivot points. Pivot points are significant political, social, and cultural events on the horizon or significant changes in conditions that present crisis or opportunity moments that are critical to engage. For example, a pivot point could be a contract fight, an election, a pandemic, a tropical storm or tornado, or a new executive order or law.

You will likely be considering a primary pivot point as you identify the need for a scenario exercise in the first place. For example, you might be preparing for a potential governing moment, a significant cultural event, or a Supreme Court decision. But there are many others that also will impact the conditions in which you are fighting. To identify the right pivot points to include in your scenario, consider what events on the horizon or changing conditions are critical moments to build power and meet your desired outcomes. A few key pivot points will anchor your scenario.

3B. Set your time horizon. To determine the right time horizon for you, you should think about what will help your participants achieve the outcomes most effectively. It can be helpful to put the time horizon after the main pivot point you are preparing for to help you play out how conditions develop in different outcomes and to prepare to meet future conditions regardless of the outcome.

For example, a group looking to prepare for the post-2026 election governing moment might put their time horizon in 2027 to strategize about how to prepare for various outcomes. Another group planning to work on the 2030 Census might choose the 2028 census pilots as their pivot point and situate their scenario in 2029.

3C. Develop conditions using signals and trends. Once you know your grounding pivot points and your time horizon, you need to develop conditions of the future you may face. To build plausible future conditions, we engage in signals chasing, or the process of identifying early signs of change that may show us how the future might be different from the present.

- Signals are specific, often surprising examples that hint at larger shifts or trends before they become obvious. They are current, concrete, and usually not yet mainstream. Examples include new behaviors, products, initiatives, policy positions, community actions, inventions, and data points.
- Signals might point to a transformation, escalation, or deescalation of what's currently happening. It can be illuminating to gather signals across different categories, including political, social, cultural, economic, environmental, technological, and more, to get a complete sense of the conditions at play.
- You can find signals in many ways, like reading the news, watching a movie, listening to podcasts, or experiencing something firsthand. When we're building more fulsome futures, we recommend interviewing key stakeholders. Having a conversation can help surface surprising signals.

Once you've gathered signals across different categories, you can create a plausible forecast of where today's conditions are leading us. Consider your time horizon and imagine how the signal will develop and present in that future. Scenarios should feel familiar in some ways, but also have shocking, uncomfortable developments that may feel unfamiliar. If you read your scenario back and it feels like you could read that news story today, there's more work to be done pulling that signal forward to the future you're imagining.

Setting your time horizon, identifying pivot points, and signals chasing don't have to happen in any particular order. You might have a strong sense of a pivot point that you want to frame the scenario around and signals chase from there, or through signals chasing, your time horizon and pivot points may become more clear. Whatever order works best for your purpose.

3D. Connect the conditions you've developed into one cohesive story and color it in to make the scenario feel as real as possible. If your purposes involve zooming into different state and local contexts, it's important to add in specific details about the region, state, or city where you're focused. You want your scenario to read like a vivid and compelling story, even though there will naturally be gaps in what you can present. You'll ask your participants to grapple with both the information you include and the questions that remain.

As you're drafting, keep in mind that a strong scenario is:

- The right length for the time you have. If you have an hour with your participants and want to spend most of the time on discussion, you want to keep your scenario concise;
- Factually accurate and updated to reflect current developments. When things change in the present, you may have to alter the future you've created to reflect those changes;
- Plausible and makes sense for the time horizon. It shouldn't be too similar to what's happening today, and should feel possible on the timeline you're imagining;
- Creative and compelling. You can use pictures, headlines, videos, or audio to better illustrate the future you're describing; and
- Tailored to your audience, purpose, and outcomes.

Once finished, you can insert your scenario into the template:

Now let's travel to the [insert time horizon]...

[Insert 1-2 page scenario]

After completing all of the above and deleting the bracketed instructions in the template, you're ready to Reflect, Discuss, Act!

Reflect, Discuss, Act [Template]

Prior to beginning this scenario exercise, please read through this [scenario exercise primer](#) for information on scenario planning and helpful tips for how to get the most out of a scenario exercise. Once you've read that, take some time (10 mins) to customize the purpose, outcomes, and ground rules for yourself/your group.

Purpose:

- Expose participants to plausible future political, social, and cultural conditions.
- Cultivate a creative space for participants to assess their current strategies and the posture needed to face future challenges and opportunities.

Outcomes:

- Assess relationships you need to cultivate or strengthen to meet future conditions.
- Understand how to shift priorities given potential opportunities and threats.
- *[other outcome?]*

Ground Rules:

- Don't fight the scenario: These conditions are not predictive, they are possible stories about the way the future may evolve informed by the current moment. They offer some specific details, and have gaps that will raise questions—grapple with both.
- Focus on learning and strategic seed-planting: When engaging in scenario thinking, it's important to remember that this is a sandbox for you to try out ideas. People should have the space to share their initial ideas and bolder strategic thinking without worrying they are committing to any specific work.
- To ensure that participants feel that they can speak candidly, we advise against recording scenario planning exercises, as many people feel uncomfortable speaking if they think that they are being recorded.

Directions

This exercise is designed to take at least an hour, but can be adjusted to meet your time constraints and group size.

1. **Read through the short scenario (5 min).** If you're working in a group, appoint someone to read it aloud. As you read or listen, feel free to jot down notes about what stands out to you and any immediate reactions you have to the future being described.
2. After reading through the scenario, fill out the template solo or with your team:

- **Reflect (10 min)** to examine the political, social, and cultural landscape in this future. Metabolize and name how you're feeling about this future. Surface concerns, bright spots, and questions about your (and your organization's, networks', and communities') place in this future.
- **Discuss (20 min)** to brainstorm how you can shape your (and your organization's, networks', and communities') actions today to better meet or change future conditions.
- **Act (25 min)** to inform a concrete plan for how to incorporate your reflections into your work. How can this conversation kickstart necessary steps to build new strategies, make shifts in priorities, or develop needed infrastructure?

Now let's travel to the [insert time horizon]...

[Insert 1-page scenario]

Reflect, Discuss, Act [customize questions]

Reflect (10 min)	
Discuss (20 min)	
Act (25 min)	

Scenario Thinking
in Action

PESTLE JaM

What's a PESTLE JaM?

PESTLE JaM is an exercise building on a tool developed by American scholar and expert strategic planner Francis Aguilar.

It's used to identify drivers of change, which are big forces reshaping today's landscape into something new, and think boldly and creatively about how to advance your goals no matter what the future might bring.

This exercise can be done individually, but it is most fruitful in a group setting with an hour or more to work.

A PESTLE JaM allows you to

- 1 Identify trends over time,
- 2 Learn how to better anticipate changes to future conditions, and
- 3 Spark creative thinking about wielding what is within your control to shape or influence the future.

PESTLE JaM Drivers are:

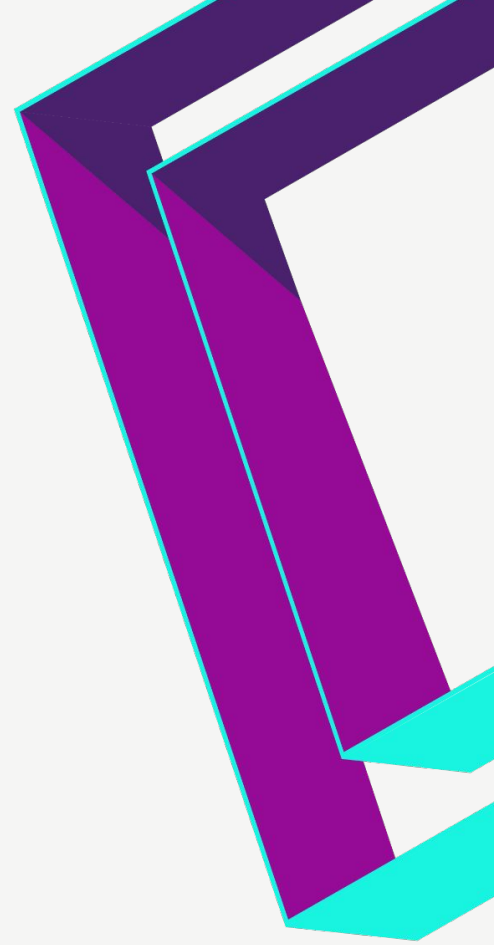
P	Political
E	Economic
S	Social
T	Technological
L	Legislative
E	Environmental
J	Judicial and...
M	Movement

How to use this tool?

Solo or with a group, you are going to:

- 1 **Identify and sort drivers of change** 15 min
- 2 **Discuss important drivers and choose one to focus on** 10 min
- 3 **Brainstorm possible futures** 15 min
- 4 **Create short forecasts** 10 min
- 5 **Share findings, if working in a group** 10 min

This exercise is designed to take at least an hour, but can be adjusted to fit your schedule and group size.



Identify and sort drivers

15 min

Drivers might be new laws or regulations, election outcomes, changes in wealth and income gaps, changing consumer habits or social norms, inventions, impacts from climate change, or any number of other impactful changes in the world around us. For the purposes of this exercise, it's useful to be specific and make note of the impact of the driver.

Individually, in pairs, or in small groups, brainstorm drivers of change you see in the world.

- In person, we recommend using post-it notes or different colored pens/markers to physically distinguish between categories. If your group is meeting online, consider an online board tool to use virtual sticky notes.
- Depending on the total time you have for this exercise, you can have participants sort simultaneously in just a few minutes or, with more time, have folks share with the group what their drivers are and where they'd categorize them.



Political



Economic

A solid orange vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the image, extending from the top to the bottom.

Social

A solid purple vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the image, extending from the top to the bottom.

Technological

A solid purple vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the image, extending from the top to the bottom.

Legislative

Environmental

A solid orange vertical bar is positioned on the left side of the image, extending from the top to the bottom.

Judicial



Movement

Discuss important drivers and choose one to focus on

10 min

Identify the most important drivers.

Not all drivers are equally impactful or likely. After sorting drivers into categories, take at least 10 minutes as a group to discuss which drivers seem most likely and most important. Some guiding questions:

- Will this driver create change across multiple categories?
- Which drivers would have the greatest impact on your organization and work?
- What evidence suggests this driver is gaining momentum or is likely to materialize?

Once you've identified the more likely and important drivers of change, pick one to focus on. If you have a group larger than 5 or so, you may want to break into small groups and have each group work with a different driver of change.

Brainstorm possible futures

15 min

Brainstorm the possible future conditions associated with your driver of change by mapping out the consequences.

A tool to do this is the “Futures Wheel,” which is a tool developed by author and futurist, Jerome C. Glenn. To use this tool:

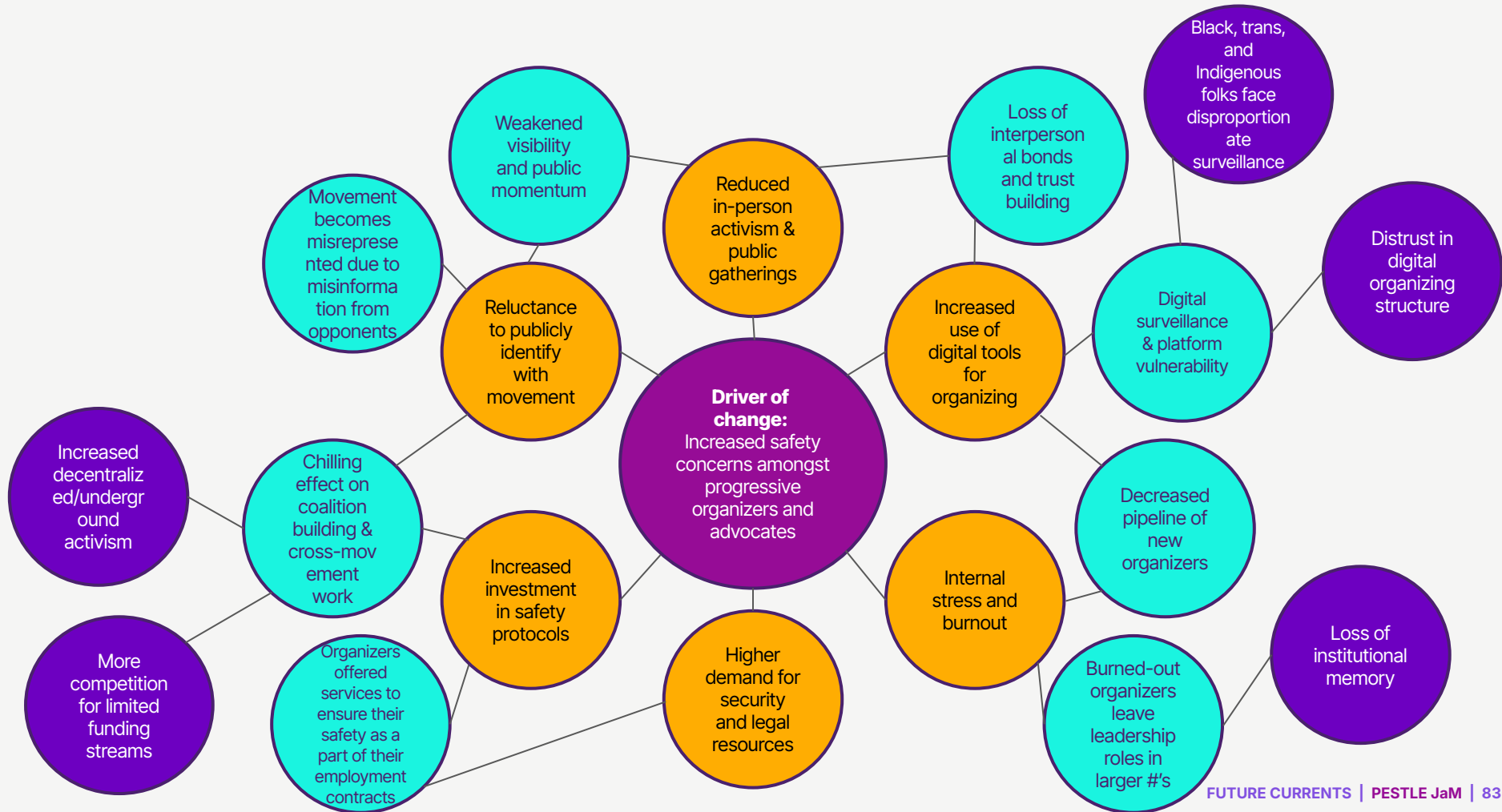
1. Place your chosen driver of change at the center of the wheel.
2. Identify the first-order consequences, which are direct results of the driver you’re exploring. Write each consequence you can think of in a separate bubble or on a separate sticky note in the first ring around the driver of change at the center.
3. Identify second-order consequences, which are indirect impacts that stem from the first-order direct consequences.
4. Identify the third-order consequences and note them in the third ring. These are often non obvious consequences. Third-order consequences help explore the far-reaching implications of a driver of change, and allow for the more surprising conditions that make up a scenario.

Futures Wheel Example

Ensure that you're thinking about the broader system by imagining consequences from various spaces including the economy, environment, culture, technology, political landscape, etc. Include both negative and positive consequences.

This tool allows you to work from one driver of change into a future where that driver's ripple effects can be seen in many areas of life.

- Driver of change at the center
- First-order consequences: orange
- Second-order consequences: teal
- Third-order consequences: purple



Create short forecasts

10 min

Craft a few short forecasts of the future using your “Futures Wheel.”

Consider using the prompt: Over the [insert time horizon], [insert driver of change] has led to [insert third-order consequence] due to [insert second-order consequence].

As an example:

- Over the next four years, increased safety concerns amongst progressive organizers and advocates has led to a loss of institutional memory across the movement as burned-out organizers leave leadership roles in large numbers.
- Over the next year, increased safety concerns amongst progressive organizers and advocates has led to increased decentralized underground activism due to a chilling effect on coalition building and cross-movement work.

This activity can help craft surprising scenarios that can be used across our scenario planning tools.

Share findings

10 min

If you've been brainstorming possible futures in small groups:

Come back together and share what you've developed, including highlights from your "Futures Wheel" and some of your forecasts into the future.