



Scenario building

Scenario building is a participatory planning and strategy tool that helps people to imagine a set of possible future outcomes. Scenario building is a form of visioning. It is not a tool designed to build consensus around a particular single vision of the future, but to explore the political, social and economic realities of a situation. The scenarios that evolve can show both positive and negative outcomes of different choices and this can prompt discussion about possible points of conflict and possible points of common interest or agreement among different stakeholders. Scenario building works best in situations that are socially complex and changing, and where uncertainty about the future and different stakeholder positions dominate. The process can help participants to create scenarios that answer the question 'What if...?' creatively and in a way that unifies diverse social groups as they explore the potential futures and ways of getting there. Scenario building may use a suite of techniques to evolve different scenarios, explore stakeholder assumptions and encourage mutual understanding about a particular planning or service provision issue.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Needs experienced, creative and dynamic facilitation to bring out new ideas from participants.
- Some experience of conflict management and mediation is useful.

Equipment

- Flip chart.
- Cards.

Time

- Needs time for careful preparation.
- Depending on the numbers of people involved and the number of sessions needed, Scenario building may take a week or more in half day sessions.

Costs

- These will include costs of venue, facilitators' and participants' time, and equipment (dependent on context).

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING: ★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★★★

Strengths

- A strong method for dealing with communities facing changes, uncertainties or problems, or when groups of stakeholders are in conflict about natural resource or infrastructure planning.

Weaknesses

- Requires a skilled facilitator who understands the tool.
- Takes committed participation and some time and effort to be effective.
- Will not work if there is insufficient buy-in from key stakeholders.

Useful sources of information

Case study

- G.D. Peterson, T.D. Beard JR, E.M. Bennett, S.R. Carpenter, G.S. Cumming, C.L. Dent and T.D. Havlicek (2003). Assessing future ecosystem services: a case study of the Northern Highlands Lake District, Wisconsin. *Conservation Ecology* **7(3)**, 1.

Reports

- Scenario analysis: a tool for task managers. J.N. Maack (2001). In: *Social analysis: selected tools and techniques*. Social Development Papers Number 36. The World Bank, Washington, DC.
- What if? The art of scenario thinking for nonprofits. D. Scarce and K. Fulton (2004). Global Business Network, Emeryville, CA. www.gbn.com
- Anticipating change: scenarios as a tool for adaptive forest management: a guide. E. Wollenberg, D. Edmunds and L. Buck (2000). CIFOR, Bogor, Indonesia.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox