



Job Aid: How to Conduct a “Visioning” Exercise

This job aid provides general guidance for conducting a visioning exercise. The visioning exercise asks group members what kind of community they would like to live in. Explain that the object is to collect as many ideas as possible – nothing is too small, too big, or too crazy for consideration. This technique has been used in real-life cities with great success.

Background:

- Why bother with visions of the future when today’s problems seem overwhelming?” *Both problem solving and visioning are important; they are quite different approaches that should be used in combination.*
- *Visioning* generates a common goal, hope, and encouragement; offers a possibility for fundamental change; gives people a sense of control; gives a group something to move toward; and generates creative thinking and passion.
- With *problem solving*, a group can become mired in technical details and political problems and may even disagree on how to define the problem. Problem solving, although useful, rarely results in any really fundamental change.
- A *problem* is something *negative* to *move away* from, whereas a *vision* is something *positive* to *move toward*.
- In moving toward a vision, you will be likely to encounter a number of problems to solve.

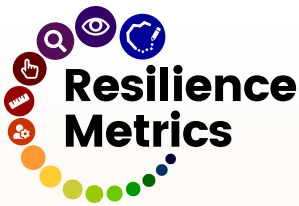
Guidance for Conducting the Visioning Exercise:

- Break into small groups to brainstorm what an ideal community would be like in 10 to 20 years. Encourage group members to be specific. As a guide, the group leaders might use the categories used to describe change in your community. The categories might include people, housing, schools, job/businesses, health care, crime, transportation, amenities, environment, and public involvement.
- Ask, “What would your community be like if you had the power to make it any way you wanted? Where would people live? Where would they work? How would they get to their schools and workplaces? On their days off, where would they go and what would they do? What kind of a house would you live in? Where would you shop? How would you get there? What kind of energy would be used for heating? For transportation? For travel? Where would it come from? How would the air, water, and environment be kept clean?”
- Return to the large group. Ask one member from each group to make one positive, declarative one-sentence statement about how the community will be in the future. Make the statement in the present tense. Examples: There are lots of bike trails. You can walk at night in safety. Transportation is fast, clean, convenient, safe and cheap.
- Write these statements on a piece of newsprint that all can see and that can be saved for revision later. Continue around the room, and then repeat the sequence with another member of each group. Continue until time is short or ideas are being repeated. Then ask if there are any other hot ideas. (Note: you may have to rephrase ideas into simple declarative present-tense sentences. Ask the speaker if you have retained the gist.)

Note that in multicultural groups, you may get different visions based on different cultural backgrounds. Be alert to statements that may have cultural, ethnic, or even gender roots. *The goal is not to find the majority opinion, but to arrive at a vision that reflects the thinking of the diverse groups in any community.*



This job aid was created to serve as a reference for individuals interested in indicators and metrics to help communities define and track progress on their climate adaptation goals. Additional background and resources are available on the website: www.ResilienceMetrics.org. This website was developed in partnership with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System with funding from NOAA.



- Ask group members to reflect on what they are noticing about this envisioned community. Ask them also to highlight some of the major differences between now and the future they have created. Most will initially focus on population size and technology change, but also try to elicit changes in attitudes and values regarding the community or surrounding environment, in concepts of what constitutes “progress,” and in standard of living and quality of life. (Standard of living refers to economic success and comfort; quality of life refers to more intangible satisfaction with life in general.)
- Ask group members to put themselves in the place of a resident 50 years ago and to try to imagine the likelihood of some of these changes. Were some changes predictable? Were others outside the realm of prediction? Remind group members that the changes of the next 50 years will probably be just as astounding. Things that seem impossible now, may become commonplace to their grandchildren.
- Spend about 20 minutes trying to group elements of the vision into some common themes. Find the areas of consensus, and identify any areas of disagreement. Focus on the areas of consensus. Create a new sheet listing items that have strong support from either the entire group or a subgroup. Be careful to nurture ideas that may come from an ethnic or gender perspective even though they may not initially gain the support of the entire class. Vision statements can include ideas that pertain to only one segment of the community, such as, women can walk around at night without being afraid; the community has developed a cultural center open to all with an exhibit of local art; and students can walk to school without interference by drug dealers.
- You may spend some time also to explore issues that the whole group does not agree on – what are the issues? Can common ground be found? Under what circumstances? How would the group like to deal with these issues of disagreement? Do not ignore them but instead see if the group can come to a shared understanding of their differences and possibly move toward each other.
- Ideally, the common vision is presented in a graphic form (maybe people want to draw, or you work with a graphic note taker). It can include photos, maps, and other images. Or it can be a list of ideas. Simply articulating a vision can be a powerful learning tool.
- In the real world, of course, having a vision is only a first step. An old proverb says,

*A vision without a plan is just a dream.
A plan without a vision is just drudgery.
But a vision with a plan can change the world.*

Planning the next steps toward achieving their community vision will be the subject of other aspects of your work, but the vision constitutes an important anchor for the community to come back to. Depending on the context and participants, explore presenting the vision to others in the community, for example, by presenting the ideas to the city council, organizing a small awareness-raising event, or writing an opinion piece for the local newspaper. Participants may discover other strategies and they can be motivating next steps.

Source: Modified from World Resources Institute (WRI), 2000 and [The NGO Café \(https://www.gdrc.org/ngo/ncafe-ks.html\)](https://www.gdrc.org/ngo/ncafe-ks.html)