

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE LEADERS

About Scenario Planning

Adapted from *What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits*
by Diana Searce, Katherine Fulton, and the Global Business Network

Scenario planning is a process through which stories of possible futures are developed and then shape experiences in order to inform strategy. It is a way of thinking about and managing change, of exploring the future so that we might be better prepared, of forcing ourselves to embrace what is out of our control. It is a tool that tests the mind, challenges belief, stretches the spirit, and at its best, creates new sources of hope.

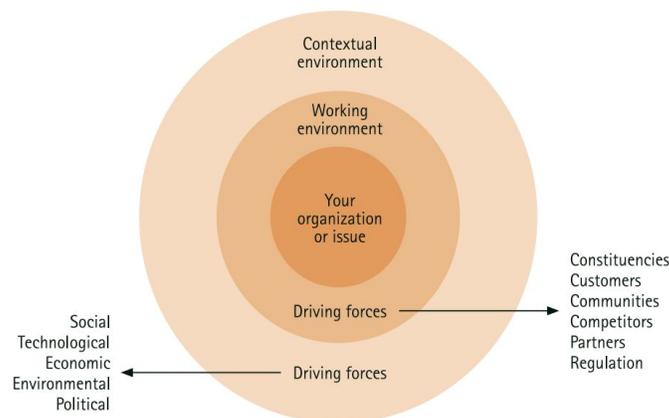
For our movement to shape the future, we must align and leverage the precious resources of progressive organizations to face these external crises if we are to effectively address these challenges at the scale and speed with which they are approaching.

The following provides a brief overview of some of the core principles involved in scenario planning work.

Three Fundamental Principles

The Long View: The day-to-day work of organizations is driven by immediate needs and concerns. For example, constant attacks from the Administration, simultaneous campaigns, and electoral cycles keep us grounded in the near-term. Scenario planning creates the space for intentional longer-term planning.

Outside-In Thinking: Most organizations spend time thinking about their own field and base, which is natural. But, it is equally important to identify external factors that may impact your work.



Multiple Perspectives: Perspectives from a variety of stakeholders and experts will help you better understand your own assumptions as well as the assumptions of others. Scenario planning can serve as a platform to bring diverse, sometimes divergent, ideas together.

Conditions for Success

Scenario planning sets strategic direction to catalyze bold action, accelerates collaborative learning, and creates alignment both internally and among external partners. In order for scenario planning to be effective, the following conditions must exist:

- You are **open to hearing multiple perspectives** and challenging commonly held assumptions.
- You are **positioned to change** in a meaningful way.
- You have a **well-positioned leader** in the process.
- You are **willing to commit** the necessary resources.

The Basic Process for Scenario Thinking

Orient: Clarify the issue at stake. Ask yourself, what are the challenges that your organization or community faces? What is the nature of those challenges? How will they play out in the future?

Explore: Explore the driving factors that could shape the issue. These driving forces are the forces of change outside your organization that will shape future dynamics. They can either be predetermined elements or uncertainties.

Synthesize: Combine the external factors that you have identified to create your scenario framework. Narrow these external factors to the most important ones and use this to develop your scenarios.

Act: Use the scenarios to inform and inspire action. What are the implications that were drawn out from the scenarios and how does that inform your strategy? What actions would you take today to prepare?

Monitor: Create mechanisms that will help your organization track shifts in the environment so that you can adapt your strategy and plan accordingly.

Decision-Making Tree

Scenario planning isn't always the ideal tool. This decision tree can be used to determine if scenario planning is appropriate to inform your strategy.

