



A Practical Worksheet to Support Scenario Thinking

Scenario planning can be used by any entity that needs to sustain itself beyond a short-term (i.e. visible) future. It is a way of thinking and a process that you should revisit as long as you are operating in uncertainty.

Get Started

Step 1: Identify who should be in room

Scenario thinking is a team activity strengthened by diverse perspectives. Brainstorm the most important experiences or perspective to have in the room so you do not have any blind spots in envisioning future scenarios. Include those with proximate/lived experience, expertise in program, legal, financial, policy, etc., and demographic diversity.

Necessary expertise or lived experience	Possible participants

Pro Tip: Include informal leaders in addition to formal leaders (i.e., those with titles and broad responsibilities). Informal leaders are highly trusted and are culture carriers in your initiative. They will be instrumental in creating and communicating scenario thinking with your wider group.

Step 2: Consider communications

Scenario planning is a way to get everyone to see similar potential futures while the present is still murky. List existing channels (e.g., email, newsletter, slack, group meetings, etc.) and plan for 2-3 communications to align team and give transparency to decision-making.

Communication channel	Person responsible

Pro Tip: Adults process information in four predominant modes: listening, reading, pictures, and through physical action like writing. In selecting communication channels, cover multiple ways adults learn to ensure your message is really heard by everyone on the team

Build Scenarios

Step 1: Identify uncertainties <i>Brainstorm and prioritize uncertainties outside your scope of influence (e.g., economic, health, environmental, etc.).</i>		Step 2: Describe future for each <i>Describe future in three outlooks: sunshine (back to pre-pandemic stability in 0-18 months), partly cloudy (stability in 18 months-3 years), or rain (stability in 3-5 years).</i>			Step 3: Identify market signals <i>Write best way to know if outlook looks more like sunshine, cloudy or rain.</i>
Uncertainty	Priority?	Sunshine	Partly Cloudy	Rain	Market Signals
<p>Pro Tip: Scenario thinking can be shortchanged by only brainstorming financial uncertainties. Program and impact uncertainties are equally vital to attaining your mission. Make sure your list covers all three.</p>		<p>Pro Tip: The multiple pandemics have created permanent shifts in society. What are things that are not likely to revert back to their pre-pandemic state? Look for patterns across all scenarios. Are there elements of your work you have to change regardless of weather?</p>			<p>Pro Tip: Look for leading and lagging market signals. Leading signals are those that may show up outside your organization (e.g., rising unemployment) before you see a lagging signal in your work (e.g., increased demand for services).</p>



Make a Plan

Step 1: Consider revisions to your theory of change				
<i>Fill out high-level theory of change. Circle elements that need to hibernate and/or add new opportunities to address.</i>				
	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Current				
NEW				

Step 2: Create a financial and programmatic plan for each of the scenarios.			
<i>What are the key elements of your initiative and how do they shift in each scenario?</i>			
Key Activities	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Rain
Program offerings			
Policy/advocacy			
Capabilities			
Budget			
Administration/structure			
Communication			
Fundraising			

Step 3: Revisit market signals on a frequent basis
<i>The world around you will keep changing, by tracking the market signals you will get a weather forecast before stepping outside without your umbrella.</i>