

METHOD FUTURE WORKSHOP



Area of CoP Activity: Learning and Developing practice
Taking Action as a Community

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Inquire
Design
Prototype

CoP Success Factor: Community Interaction
Mutual Culture, Values, Belonging
Leadership
Strategy

EIGE Step: Step 1: Getting started
Step 3: Setting up a GEP
Step 6: What comes after the GEP

Group Size: 5-20

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: The aim of Future Workshop is for all participants to design their desired future without any objections or restrictions, and to develop unconventional and imaginative solutions to an issue or a problem. Overall, Future Workshop works with an atmosphere that promotes creativity and visionary thinking.

More Information: www.partizipation.at/future-workshop.html
www.medialabamsterdam.com/toolkit/method-card/future-workshop/
www.die-bonn.de/esprid/dokumente/doc-2004/apel04_02.pdf

FUTURE WORKSHOP¹

Short description

Future Workshop allows all participants to design their desired future without any objections or restrictions from experts or the organisation or leading personalities. The aim of this activity is two-fold: first, to design a desired future, and second, to develop unconventional and imaginative solutions to an issue or a problem. Overall, Future Workshop works with an atmosphere that promotes creativity and visionary thinking.

When to use

Future Workshop is effective when new ideas need to be developed and visions need to be explored. Furthermore, it leads to new perspectives as well as a clear view of future developments and possibilities for oneself and the organisation. This method is a relatively straightforward process and it can be run as a standalone activity or it can be informed by previous participative method outputs. A particularly good way to connect this workshop to other methods in this toolkit is to present the outputs from the earlier activities as a stimulus to the conversation.

How to

A: Brief explanation

Future Workshop consists of three main phases:

- **Phase 1: Criticism phase (optional) 20-30 min** – in this phase the current situation is being analysed and problems are being identified.
- **Phase 2: Vision phase 45-60 min** – ideas and suggestions are being developed (the initial ideas do not have to be realistic and can be visionary or utopian). Possible obstacles are being ignored at this stage. Participants can think big, everything is possible and there is no right or wrong. There is more benefit in building a challenging and even an unrealistic future and then adapting it than in being too cautious and missing out on creating an aspiring vision for future success.
- **Phase 3: Implementation phase 45-60 min** – the suggestions are being structured and now you are evaluating if they are realistic and viable. In this phase the participants are reaching an agreement on how to proceed from there.

B: Detailed step-by-step guide

- A concept needs to be defined that will be the main objective of the workshop. You could let the participants have the issues/ questions to be worked in before the event, or use ideas from past method outputs.
- As a facilitator explain the topic of the session as well as the aims.
- **Phase 1:** The participants are asked to reflect on the status quo and to write down their points of critique. This could be done individually, where you, the facilitator, record the points of critique on a flipchart/virtual whiteboard for everyone to see. Depending on the group dynamic or the overall mood it might be better to start with the vision phase instead of the criticism phase to not demotivate participants from the start. This part can take 20-30 minutes.
- **Phase 2:** Divide participants into small groups of 4-5 (or breakout rooms). Encourage them to envision their desired future or solutions. The question they can ask themselves is “what would the ideal future look like?”. The visions, ideas and approaches to solving the problem do not have to be realistic at this point; there are no barriers or limits. This should last 45-60 min. Use the following trigger questions you can modify as required. Groups/breakout rooms should record their conversation on flip charts or sheets/virtual whiteboard. Encourage them to speak in the present tense. The questions are:



¹ Adapted from Participation & Sustainable Development in Europe, <https://www.partizipation.at/future-workshop.html>; mediaLABamsterdam, <https://medialabamsterdam.com/toolkit/method-card/future-workshop/>; and Apel 2004, https://www.die-bonn.de/esprid/dokumente/doc-2004/apel04_02.pdf.

Adapted from the Futures Toolkit: Tools for Futures Thinking and Foresight Across UK Government, Government Office for Science, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/futures-toolkit-for-policy-makers-and-analysts>, Visioning.

- ✓ *What have we achieved?*
 - ✓ *Who are our stakeholders? How have they benefited from our intervention?*
 - ✓ *What are we most proud about?*
 - ✓ *What procedures, structures, or decision-making processes have we designed to ensure the project is sustained?*
 - ✓ *How are we measuring progress and success?*
 - ✓ *Is there anything we still need to change?*
 - ✓ *What are the challenges we face now?*
 - ✓ *What have we learned from our successes and failures?*
- Invite groups/close virtual breakout rooms to provide feedback 5 min. per group plus 5 to 10 min. for collective discussion and ask participants to present a summary of their discussion (ask to refrain from reading everything from their sheets). This step is to facilitate a short discussion to compare and contrast the visions and identify the areas of agreement that will form the heart of the vision. Do acknowledge any differences of emphasis or detail that will need to be considered later. Listen in to the conversations and do not let anyone question whether someone else's aspiration is possible – this is not the point of this discussion.
 - **Phase 3:** The objective of this step is for groups to come back to the reality and discuss what needs to happen if the vision is to be delivered. This phase is also lengthy and should take 45-60 min. Keep participants in the same groups/breakout rooms to work with the vision they have developed. Use the following prop questions, but you may wish to modify them. Ensure the ideas are recorded on flipchart/sheets/virtual whiteboards for you to gather:
 - ✓ *How close are we to our vision?*
 - ✓ *What needs to change to achieve the vision?*
 - ✓ *Which changes are in our control? Which are not?*
 - ✓ *What are the key steps towards achieving the vision? When do we need to achieve them by?*
 - ✓ *What resources do we need? Who will lead the process?*
 - ✓ *Who will be the winners and losers in this change? How do we bring people with us?*
 - Next, as before, invite groups/close virtual breakout rooms to provide feedback 5 min. per group plus 5 to 10 min. for collective discussion and ask participants to present a summary of their discussion to compare and contrast what needs to happen now and how it is going to be resourced.
 - Gather all notes from the groups and post-event prepare an aggregated vision that captures as many of the points as possible on 1-2 pages summarising the vision and the implementation (leave the criticism outputs out), and distribute to participants to aid their change implementation.

Additional ideas / information

- The duration of the method can be shortened if participants are very knowledgeable about the status quo and you skip the criticism phase.
- Active and honest participation is essential for the success of the *Future Workshop*. If participation can't be encouraged the whole session might be unsuccessful. If you want participants to "practice" thinking about a fantasy vision, before they start, conduct a short warm up where participants envision their own future success, rather than organisational/institutional future. For example, ask them to think forward 5-10 years and imagine they have achieved their aspirations. Ask them to think "What they do, where they live, what they are planning to do for their next holiday, what the next week at work holds for them", etc. They do not share their visions.
- Creating a creative and non-judgemental atmosphere is crucial for the generation of new solutions and needs to be considered when preparing the room/location, etc.
- Future workshop is a method that can be designed in very creative ways. When presenting their results, participants can be asked to do that in the form of a poem, sculpture, drawing, sketch or by using modelling clay etc.
- Future Workshop is an action-oriented method. The overall goal should not only be the creation and generation of new ideas but crucially the implementation.



Template

FUTURE WORKSHOP

CRITICISM

FANTASY

IMPLEMENTATION

REFERENCES

Apel, Heino. 2004. "The Future Workshop." Available from: https://www.die-bonn.de/espid/dokumente/doc-2004/apel04_02.pdf.

MediaLABamsterdam.2019. n.d. "Design method toolkit." Available from: <https://medialabamsterdam.com/toolkit/>.

Participation and Sustainable Development in Europe. 2019. Available from: <https://www.partizipation.at/en.html>.