

Shaping Our Future

Facilitator's Guidebook

written by:

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Foreward

Facts, Fiction, and the Future

Betty S. Flowers,

Scenario Writer and

Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum

As a futurist, the question I'm most often asked is, "What is the future going to be?" I always answer that the future is unpredictable—and that, therefore, any story about the future is a fiction. The futurist is not so much a fortune-teller as a storyteller.

What kind of story is the most useful when it comes to the future? The answer to that question is: the story that is created by the people who will live in it. Scenario-building is a powerful process because as people create fictions of the future together, they begin to experience how much power they have to tell their own story—and thus, to create their own future.

The power of storytelling can be seen most clearly in the life of an individual. Each of our lives is a collection of facts. And these facts have actually happened. There's nothing we can do to change them. But the facts are embedded in a story we tell about ourselves. And while the facts of the past are beyond our ability to change, the narrative of the facts is completely in our power to shape. The reason this is important, especially for young people, is that the future is shaped not by the facts, but by the story we tell about these facts.

For example, suppose someone had a terrible disease as a child. This fact could be embedded in a hero story—"against great odds, after overcoming a terrible disease, Robert managed to get his high school degree." Or we could tell the story as a victim story—"Because of his disease, Robert was forced to spend twice as many years in high school as his friends." Or the story could be told as a history of learning—"After contracting a terrible disease, Robert learned how to be patient. And this patience, developed to a high degree, was crucial to his successful career as a psychologist." Depending on the story you're telling—whether that story is about the past, the present, or the future—the facts can "make" you a hero, a victim, or a learner.

The power to tell our own story about who we are and who we might become is one of our least acknowledged powers. Most young people unthinkingly accept the stories that are given to them by their parents and their culture. And many of these stories, especially those that come from the commercial side of our culture, are useless, or even actually harmful. They implicitly tell us that we are not thin enough or rich enough or something else enough—which is why we need to buy a particular product to be thin or rich or something else.

Scenarios are antidotes to the implicit stories we find in popular culture because they are explicitly constructed rather than unconsciously accepted. Scenarios also function to educate the imagination by helping it to be flexibly oriented toward the future. This flexibility means that we approach the future not with a belief about what it will be, but with a set of possibilities—two or more scenarios that encourage us to think about the future in different ways.

Many large corporations spend a great deal of time and money to build useful, challenging scenarios. What makes this book special is that it shows how, with limited time and money, a scenario workshop can be designed and administered so that a group of young people can have the deeply liberating experience of what it means to shape a destiny—or two or three.

Preface

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

The Foundation for Our Future, the Center for a Sustainable Future and Shelburne Farms have joined together to initiate a new program for young adult leadership called **Shaping Our Future**.

Our findings, from over a decade of working with young adults in the area of environmental and sustainable education, pointed to some alarming observations. Young adults spend little time thinking about the future. Polls have shown that average teenagers future time reference typically ranges from hours to at best a couple of months. We began to juxtapose these findings with the work in which we have been involved for two decades now - trying to educate for a sustainable future. We have come to the conclusion that the majority of young adults do not have the context (in terms of a future time frame of reference) to meaningfully engage in action that this educational paradigm strives to stimulate. That revelation brought us to the world of strategic planners in multi-national corporations to learn about the tools they use to stretch their thinking and envision the future.

There we discovered the world of scenario planning, and set out to develop a set of processes, tools and methodologies that young adults could employ to help them actively shape their future and that of the communities where they live. We were fortunate to work with some of the best scenario planners in the world to create a process that has the rigor and depth necessary to provide young adults with the same future thinking skills as those of executives at the world's leading corporations. Scenarios are imaginative portrayals of potential futures, where the process is as important as the pictures they help develop. Young adults are engaged in deep conversations, at once free-flowing and rigorously constrained. These conversations are designed to help young story tellers see past their own cultural blind spots, and to think the unthinkable.

We have spent two years developing and piloting a set of methodologies and tools to help young adults visualize the possible worlds in which the unthinkable, the unimaginable, and the unpredictable actually come to pass. We have packaged this process into a program called **Shaping Our Future**, which will be distributed to many regions around the globe.

If a generation of young adults can imagine many possible worlds, then they can better prepare themselves for whatever future does come to pass. As they engage in this process of confronting their future, they can become enthusiastic about to shape a future that will mesh with their hopes and dreams.

It is our intention that corporations, civic organizations, schools, institutions of higher education and governmental organizations around the globe champion the notion of **Shaping Our Future**, by providing leadership in their communities that will help their young adults proactively embrace and engage in their futures in positive and constructive ways. As Alan Kay once said, The best way to predict the future is to invent it. By encouraging young people to ask **What kind of world do I want to create?** and giving them good tools and support to find their answers - we offer the next generation a real opportunity to lead.

Steve Hulbert,
Director
Foundation
for Our Future

Keith Wheeler,
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Future

Megan Camp,
*Vice President and
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Shelburne Farms

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Shaping Our Future

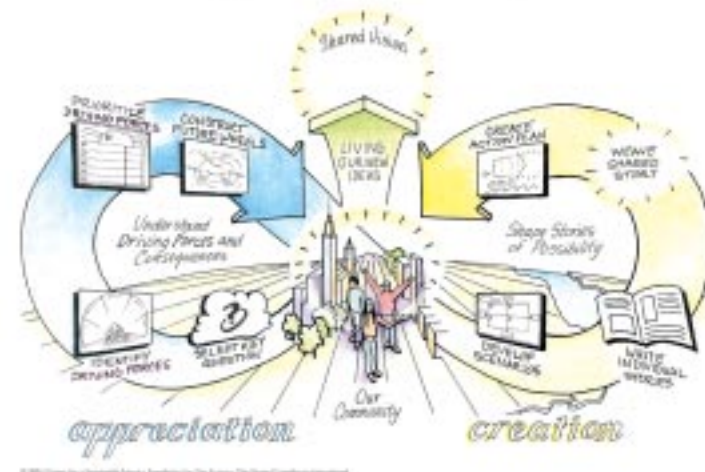
1.1 What is a Shaping Our Future Youth Leadership Institute?

The purpose of doing a Shaping Our Future Youth Leadership Institute is to foster and catalyze leadership qualities in young adults that will engage them in shaping a future that is peaceful, just, and sustainable. Participants gain skills in understanding the complex systems that shape the world, learn to create new visions of the future by developing different scenarios about key issues, and learn how to use these skills to be leaders in shaping a sustainable future.

1.2 Principles and Beliefs

- ~ Leaders of the future need to develop new vision, perspectives, strategies and stories based on their understanding of patterns in their world.
- ~ Empowering future visions in young people demands intellectual stimulation, diversity, dialogue, creativity, safety, and opportunities to explore subjects using all the human intelligences.
- ~ Young people are likely to act on their learning when they build strong connections between many ideas and events, when they can adequately reflect on their experiences, and when they engage in activities that integrate learning into everyday lives.
- ~ Young people need positive visions of the future to provide a hopeful context and perspective from which they can assess the violence, despair, cynicism, powerlessness and self-absorption often supplied by the news, music, movies, and other cultural sources.

Possibility-Based Learning Process



1.3 Why Shaping Our Future Institutes Are Valuable

They provide people with:

- ~ skills and opportunities to shape their future through the creation of scenarios (stories) of the future.
- ~ multiple perspectives of the present and future through connections with other cultures and environments.
- ~ enhanced leadership and communication skills.
- ~ a network of adult and teen leaders with the skills to conduct their own Shaping Our Future institutes in varied geographic locations.

1.4 Why Study the Future?



It is important to study the future because it is the only timeframe we can influence. We can increase our ability to influence the future by learning about future possibilities. Future thinking:

- ~ provides us with the skills and perspectives to deal with complex thoughts and ideas.
- ~ strengthens creative problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- ~ helps us develop a keener sense of social responsibility.
- ~ reduces “Future Shock” by helping us learn to see change as the norm.
- ~ helps us learn to deal with long-range issues.

Benefits to Participants:

- ~ gain an increased sense of responsibility toward the future and future generations;
- ~ learn that we create the future by our individual and collective actions, choices and decisions;
- ~ learn how to actively shape our own futures;
- ~ learn to connect present choices and actions to future outcomes;
- ~ learn to view the world systemically;
- ~ learn to imagine and create possible, probable and preferred stories about alternative futures;
- ~ learn that we have influence over the future by identifying trends, analyzing their implications and discerning plausible alternative futures;
- ~ learn that many aspects of the future are knowable; and
- ~ learn to identify and analyze information with regard to its future significance.

Shaping Our Future, really helps extend their thinking beyond what they're going to have for lunch tomorrow or what they're going to do next week to think about the implications of the choices that they make today and help them see that they have choices but their choices have certain outcomes.

~ Keith

1.5 About Scenario Planning and Why We Use It

Scenario thinking and planning is a technique that was developed by corporate planners to help make better decisions. This is especially important when long-term, high stakes decisions are required. At the corporate level, for example, an oil company might be trying to decide whether to spend (or borrow) hundreds of millions of dollars to develop a new oil field or to invest in the development of new energy sources like hydrogen fuel cell technology. But the future is uncertain: What if a major car company introduces a fuel cell car that consumers love and gasoline powered vehicles become antiques? Or, what if consumers reject the new technology because it is perceived as unsafe? What eventually happens matters a lot. It could make that big investment extremely profitable, or turn into a huge debt putting the company's survival at risk.

At the personal level, you may be trying to decide what career path to follow – one that you will enjoy and that will provide you with enough income to live the kind of life you want. This decision will determine how you spend many years of your adult life. Should you take over your family's grocery store business or become a computer programmer? It's an important decision because you will be investing a considerable amount of time and money to develop that future outcome.

Whether you are a large corporation or an individual, in order to choose wisely it would be better to have a strategy that would work well in more than one possible future. That is what scenario planning is for.

Scenario thinking and planning recognizes that while we can foresee possible outcomes for things that matter to us, we cannot predict exactly what will happen, only what might happen. Scenario thinking and planning helps us better imagine and sort through the ways the future could unfold. Having refined, multiple perspectives of the future puts us in a better position to interpret current events and better gauge where they could be leading us. They form the basis for developing strategies that will serve us well across several possible future outcomes.

Since the technique has worked well for companies dealing with these kinds of difficult challenges, we decided to adapt it for use by individuals and smaller organizations so that they could put this valuable tool to work for themselves. We first adapted the technique for middle and high school teachers to use with their students. Then, through a series of pilot programs with teenagers involved in youth leadership programs in Georgia, Massachusetts, Vermont, Tennessee and Zimbabwe, Africa, we developed the process and materials in this guidebook to help program leaders and teachers use the technique more effectively with the young people with whom they work.

1.6 Who Is This Guidebook for?

This Guidebook is for high school teachers, youth program leaders, college faculty, and others interested in leadership development who want to learn how to facilitate a Shaping Our Future Leadership Institute. It is designed as a series of steps for creating scenarios of the future in response to a question or issue that is of interest to our students.

The Guidebook is for facilitators who are working with young adults in the general age range of 15 to 24 years old. However, the process and outcomes are suitable for adults of any age.

Meeting Curriculum Standards

In the process of conducting an Institute participants will gain knowledge and skills that satisfy certain curriculum standards. Some of the more common ones include:

- proposing alternative solutions to problems;
- identifying consequences of alternatives;
- distinguishing between fact and opinion;
- making generalizations and drawing conclusions;
- recognizing bias and stereotypes;
- viewing problems or situations from multiple perspectives;
- recognizing relevance of data;
- using technology to gather and analyze information in the problem solving process;
- communicating and collaborating with others in the problem solving process;
- making predictions and comparisons based on factual information;
- collecting evidence using appropriate, reliable data; and
- choosing a reasonable solution from among various alternatives.

1.7 Time Frame and Considerations for Facilitating an Institute

The guidebook is designed to provide a series of step-by-step activities that can be done in time frames of one hour or less. This is done to make it easier for teachers to integrate the Shaping Our Future process into their classroom schedules.

The process works well for a group size of 12 to 30 people. If only one facilitator is available and the group is on the large end of the scale, you may want to ask another person to help out. If you are going solo the work is more challenging when the participants are working in small groups (usually four subgroups). In that event you could ask that each small group designate a timekeeper, a recorder to keep notes and to fill in the templates and newsprint paper, and someone to help move the process along. These jobs could rotate among members of the small group so that each person has an opportunity to develop new skills.

The entire process should take about 24 hours to complete, i.e., to get to the point where the group has created four scenarios of the future, several newspaper stories about each future, and has developed an action plan to do something that will move toward a preferred future.

Facilitators can adapt the process to fit into two or three intensive days, or spread it out over weeks depending on the schedule you work with.

Shaping Our Future - The Process

2.1 What Do Scenarios Look Like? What Are We Creating?



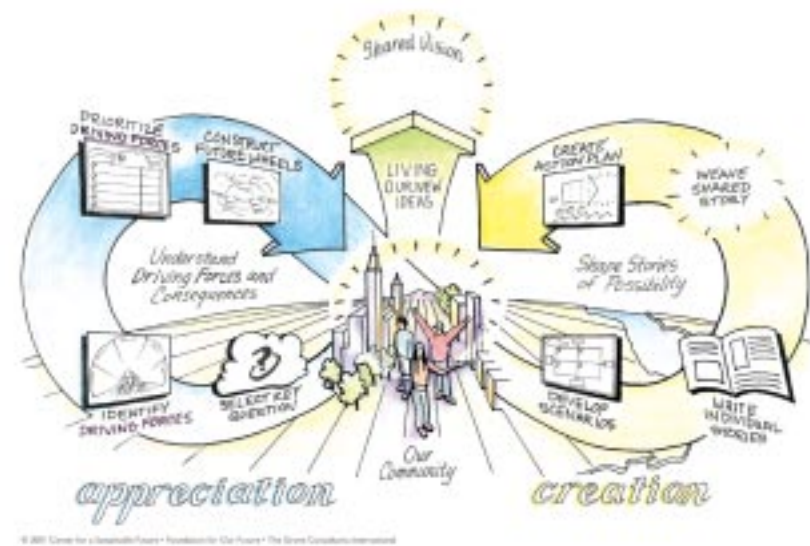
Creating future scenarios in response to a particular question or issue can help us better understand the present and consider possible actions we can take to create a better future. It is a methodical way of thinking about the unthinkable based on a few key uncertainties that are decided on in the process.

Scenario creation starts with a key question that is important to the participants. Good scenario questions don't have yes or no answers. They don't prompt an immediate answer but rather require reflection and deeper consideration. Some examples:

- What kind of a career would assure me high employment probability, provide an adequate income for myself and make me happy?
- What decisions can I make that will create a better quality of life for me, my family, or my community in the next twenty years?
- How could the internet change the way people interact with each other: between family, friends, strangers, nations, and cultures?

Once we've decided the key question we go through a process that results in four different ways the future might turn out. Those four scenarios are based on two critical uncertainties that we choose as the most important with respect to our key question. Because they are uncertain they could go one way or the other. So, each uncertainty has two endpoints for a total of four possible outcomes. By pairing up each of the endpoints we define four scenarios.

Possibility-Based Learning Process



For example, let's say that our question is "What will the role of a teacher be ten years from now?" And let's say that the most important uncertainties that we come up with are: a) who has control of the curriculum (teachers or administrators and parents); and b) what is expected of students (knowing the answer or asking better questions and pursuing them). Our four scenarios would then be about:

- i. a future where teachers are in control of the curriculum and students are expected to know the answers;
- ii. a future where teachers are in control of the curriculum and students are expected to ask better questions and pursue them;
- iii. a future where administrators and parents are in control of the curriculum and students are expected to know the answers; and
- iv. a future where administrators and parents control the curriculum and students are expected to ask better questions and pursue them.

These four scenarios are the starting points for stories that we develop which describe what these four futures could be like. In doing so, we would work into the stories a lot of the ideas and information that we developed earlier in the process: attitudes about learning and teaching, pay levels, accountability,