

Scenario Testing

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Medium to Hard
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000) Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To communicate an issue To develop community capacity To develop action plan To identify a variety of plausible trends within each issue To gain a greater understanding of possible future concerns/issues/problems
Number of people required to help to organise	A team of people (three - six) may be required
Time to organise	Short (up to six weeks) Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Publicity; Venue; Furniture; Catering; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Overhead/data projectors and screen; Audiovisual recording equipment and amplification; Artists/photographer; Printed public information sheets; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); Children's requirements; Response sheets
Innovation level	Medium to High

Description

Scenarios are a way of developing alternative futures based on different combinations of assumptions, facts and trends, and area where more understanding is needed for your particular scenario project.

They are called 'scenarios' because they are like 'scenes' in the theatre - a series of differing views or presentations of the same general topic. Once you see several scenarios at the same time, you better understand your options or possibilities.

Objective

- To test alternative (hypothetical) futures so as to make better choices today.

Desired Outcome

- Three scenarios: a positive (or optimistic), negative (or pessimistic), and neutral (or middle of the road) scenario, allowing for a more realistic assessment of future possibilities which does not assume either the best or worst outcomes. The scenarios could also include an unlikely event but one that would have a large impact if it was to occur.

Uses/Strengths

- Avoids having to model complex situations.
- Allows you to alter combinations and play 'what if' games (e.g. change the assumption and see what happens).
- Provides understanding of events and possible combinations.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Agreement may not be reached on what is the 'right' scenario to include (if the questions are controversial).
- Scenarios must be recognised as possibilities only, not firm predictions.

Step by Step Guide

1. Invite participants who have knowledge of, or are affected by, the proposal or issue of interest.
2. Invite participants to identify the underlying paradigms or unwritten laws of change; trends or driving forces and collect into general categories (e.g. economy, socio/political and wildcards or uncertainties).
3. Consider how these might affect a situation, either singly or in combination, using these steps:
 - Review the big picture
 - Review general approaches to future studies
 - Identify what you know and what you don't know
 - Select possible paradigm shifts and use them as an overall guide
 - Cluster trends and see which driving forces are most relevant to your scenario

4. Create alternative scenarios (similar to alternate scenes in a play) by mixing wildcards with trends and driving forces. Keep the number of scenarios small (four is ideal because it avoids the ‘either’ ‘or’ choice of two, and the good/bad/medium choice of three).
5. Write a brief report that states assumptions and future framework; provides observations and conclusions, gives a range of possibilities, and focuses on the next steps coming out of this study. Each scenario should be about one page.