



EXPLORATORY SCENARIO PLANNING

**Adapted from LegacySP: A Scenario
Planning Toolkit for Shrinking Regions
Working Paper WP22EW1**

By Emma Walters and Arnab Chakraborty from the
University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana

This tool was created by the National Young Farmers Coalition. This project
was produced in Partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and
the Consortium for Scenario Planning.

Who Should Use This Tool and Why?

The 2022 National Young Farmer Survey found that young and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) farmers face unique structural barriers to entering and thriving in farming, including secure land access, accessing capital, personal or family healthcare costs, and more. At the National Young Farmers Coalition (The Coalition), we have a mission to shift power and change policy to equitably resource our new generation of working farmers.

Teams of young farmer leaders are change-makers in their communities, but it can be hard to know where to start. This tool was designed for farmer leaders to provide structure for gathering information and collaborating with key stakeholders to address these structural barriers. Explore this step-by-step toolkit and apply Scenario Planning to the project you are working on towards community-level transformation

What is Scenario Planning?

Scenario planning is a planning practice that addresses future uncertainties by exploring multiple possibilities. The purpose of this tool is to move us from a place of reactive planning to a place of strategy and thoughtfulness. By guiding practitioners and stakeholders through different considerations of various futures, communities are able to define plans that effectively respond to these futures. This resource has been created to use for young farmer leaders as they work to transform their communities.

This planning approach offers practitioners and stakeholders practical context for data, guidance for analyzing narratives and stories, and a better understanding of quantitative forecasts and assumptions. Scenario planning is a tool to enhance existing planning processes rather than reinvent them and allows its participants to consider topics or issues that are beyond the immediate topic at hand. The goal of scenario planning is to act as a framework for inclusive, data-driven decision-making.

1.

Prepare

Develop team, prepare data, develop a focus question, map stakeholders, and create a SWOT analysis

2.

Envision

Team runs a two-part workshop

3.

Plan

Team identifies possible plans to address the focus question, thinks through ramifications of various plans

4.

Reflect

Bring process and outcomes back to the identified community, get feedback, get buy-in.

**Develop team****Prepare data****Define focal question****SWOT analysis****Stakeholder meeting****WORKSHOP 1
Defining Future**

1. small group visioning
2. desired future consensus
3. initial planning horizon

**WORKSHOP 2
Defining Scenarios**

1. identify barriers
2. create scenarios

Identify responses**Identify tools and interventions****Financial forecasting****Link actions to actors****Readdress horizon****Take plans back to the broader community**

“THE GOAL OF PLANNING IS TO SET A COURSE FOR A COMMUNITY’S BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE. SCENARIO PLANNING CAN TAKE MANY FORMS, BUT ITS CORE PURPOSE IS TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES TO PLAN FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE BY EXPLORING MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN.”

3. | TIMELINE

Depending on the number of staff and the amount of dedicated time available to the process, this scenario planning process could take anywhere from 6 to 9 months. If you have a dedicated team working on this project as a high priority, you can expect to finish it in about 6 months. If your organization or department is juggling multiple projects while also engaging in this planning process, it's more likely that the process will be completed in 9 or so months.

If one or more on your planning team is actively farming, incorporate your busy production season into your timeline.



Prepare | 2-3 MONTHS

It will likely take 2-3 months to build your main project team, determine your focal question, prepare relevant data, and identify participants.



Envision | 1 WEEK

The two workshops should only take half a day each. You will likely need a couple days to prepare as a team as well as a day or two organize and document the outcomes.



Plan | 1-3 MONTHS

Officially formalizing responses and inventions for scenarios will take some time. It's important to take the time to carefully consider barriers and financial forecasting.



Reflect | 1-3 MONTHS

Release your plans to the public for commentary for feedback. Depending on your unique strategy, this could take a couple of weeks to a couple of months.



PREPARE

This is a key step in setting your project team up for success. Like crop planning ahead of the growing season or pasture management for your livestock, make sure that you have the tools, information, and resources in place to get you well on your way to thrive down the road.

A. BUILDING OUT YOUR TEAM

The team will be responsible for overseeing and running the planning process. In addition to the - Leadership Team, consider who else needs to be involved?

Can you identify one or more facilitators?

B. PREPARING DATA

What information do you need to know to guide this process?

How will you measure your team's impact?

Some examples of useful indicators include:

- » Arable acreage in your county
- » Local food production (by dollars or pounds)
- » USDA grant dollars secured
- » Number of farmers and ranchers under 40
- » Land ownership by race
- » Number of farmer cooperatives
- » Housing costs in your foodshed
- » Water quality of rivers

You can find useful data in the following resources:

- » [The 2022 Young Farmers Survey Report](#)
- » [The US Ag Census](#)
- » [The US Census](#)
- » [USDA](#)

In addition to numbers from above, you can also gather useful information by gathering stories from your community.

Note that these are just examples! Your team will need to consider what is important to your community, think about where the information will come from, how it relates to the focal question or issue, and whether the information captured is meaningful.

C. DEFINE THE FOCAL QUESTION OR ISSUE AT HAND

Taking the information gathered during the preparation period, the next step is to identify a focal question to be addressed during the scenario planning process. Successful focal questions narrow the scope, reflect community concerns, address trends, and generally keep the project and process relevant. Be sure to balance staying focused with being open to ideas and circumstances that you might not have considered.

The 2022 Young Farmer Survey Report collected information about structural challenges faced by farmers. Thinking about your experience, circle or mark which of these are the top 3 challenges you have faced in your farming career:

ACCESS TO LAND	SECURE HOUSING	OTHER
ACCESS TO CREDIT OR CAPITAL	CLIMATE CHANGE	
PERSONAL / FAMILY HEALTHCARE OR HEALTH INSURANCE	RACIAL INJUSTICE	
	STUDENT LOAN DEBT	

Consider a couple of additional criteria:

- Looking at our trends and interviews, what needs to be explored more fully?
- What do our trends and interviews tell us about our food and farming community? Who are we and where do we want to go?
- What is keeping us from getting there?
- What decisions or strategic choices need to be made?
- How much time are we going to dedicate to this planning process?
- What kind of resources can we commit? What do we have access to?
- Why are we doing this and what is the purpose? Education and awareness? Strategic direction? Action identification?
- How will this question and process further racial equity?
- What is the role of advocacy and policy in this process?

Examples of uncertainties you might be facing in your farming community:

- » Older farmers are retiring and thinking about how to transfer their land to a young farmer.
- » Drought, flooding, storms, or other disastrous weather events are becoming more common, affecting farms in the area.
- » Farmers in the area are experiencing mental health issues at a higher rate than the general population.
- » The cost of living in your community is rising but farm wages are not increasing.

D. INTERNAL S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

Let's do something called a SWOT analysis. This is an organizing tool that helps you get a snapshot of what kinds of challenges and opportunities your vision is up against right now, and who will be helpful or hinder your theory of change when it comes to bringing that vision to fruition.

Strengths and weaknesses are internal. They reflect what you have on your team now and what's missing or what skills you might need to develop.

Opportunities and threats are external. They help you consider the environment you are working in. In organizing we call this your ecosystem.

Who can you collaborate with? Who will you be fighting against? This can include people who could donate funds, local organizations who can connect you with potential supporters of your project, legislators who might veto your policy proposal, and so much more!

STRENGTHS

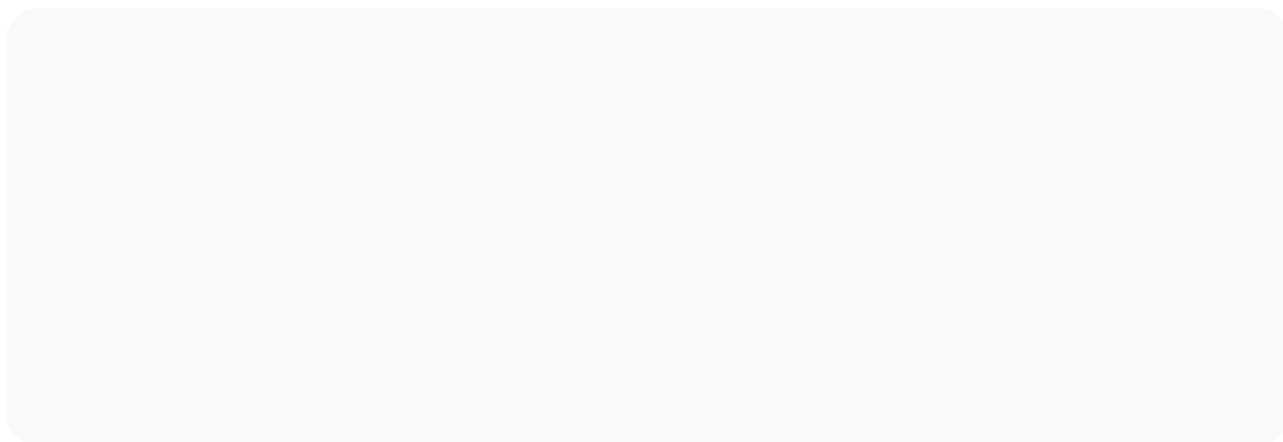
WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

E. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

In order to effectively engage the community in a scenario planning process, your team should compile a list of individuals and/or organizations who might be impacted by the outcomes. These individuals and organizations are your **stakeholders**. This list should also include key decision makers, influencers, or change makers in the community who might help create community buy-in for any initiatives or actions that result from your planning process. In other words: **Who are the people who can affect change/implement the strategies that have been identified?**



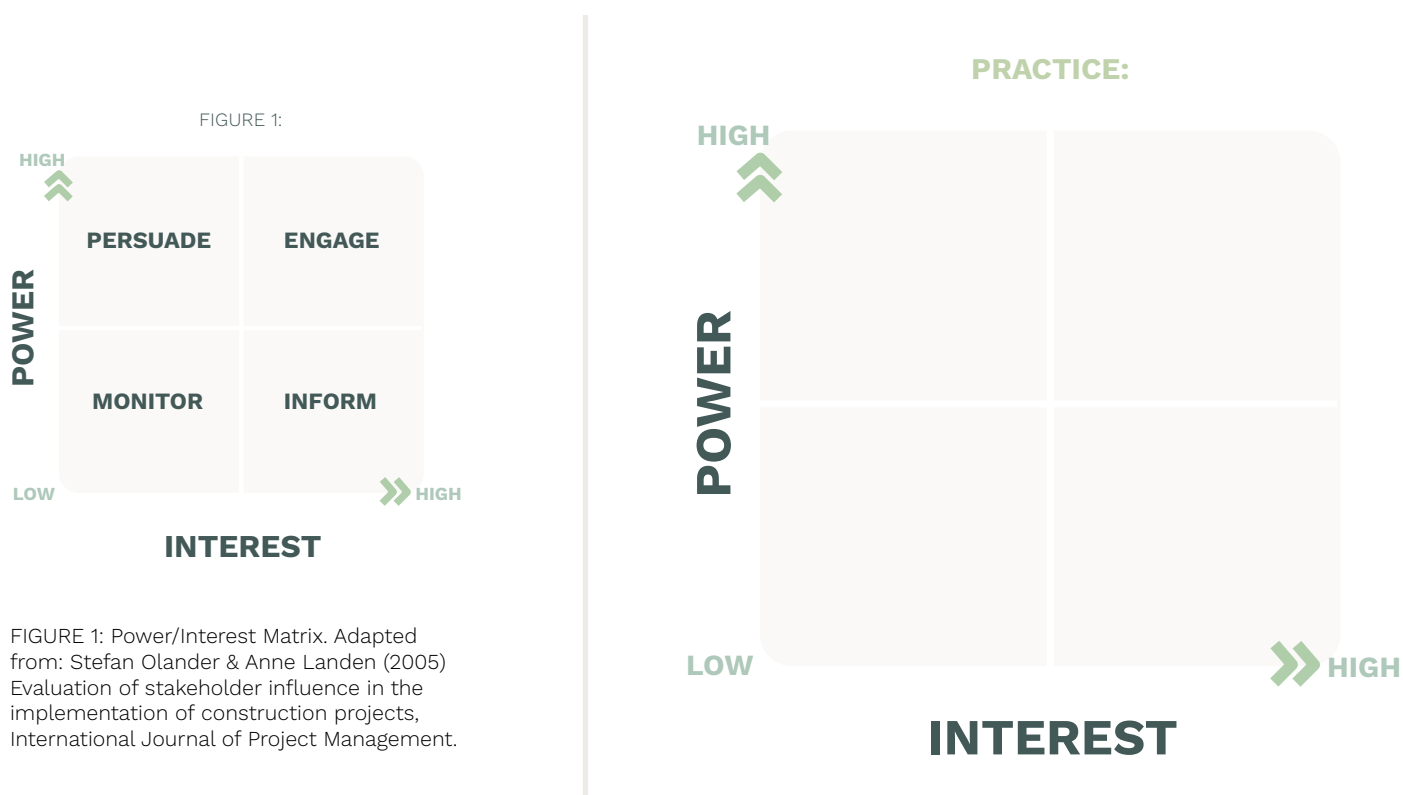
Your stakeholders can be grouped into a committee or some kind of formal group. You will engage this group specifically during the “Envision” workshops. The group can be continuously engaged throughout the process (planning and reflection), either directly or through consultation, keeping their capacity in mind outside of the workshops.

Examples of Stakeholders in the Food System

- | | |
|--|--|
| » Farmers in your foodshed | » Nonprofit staff (farmer technical assistance, land access, local food, etc.) |
| » Young Farmer Coalition Chapter members | » Community organizers |
| » Local USDA staff | » Community groups |
| » Individuals involved in local produce procurement | » Government employees from relevant departments |
| » University researchers | » Business owners |
| » Elected officials at the state, county, and local levels | » Tenant groups |
| » Neighborhood leaders | |
| » Church leaders | |

POWER MAPPING - USE THE POWER/INTEREST MATRIX

A power/interest matrix is a useful tool for identifying important stakeholders and decision makers. “Powerful” people or organizations can include not only decision makers (like elected officials or department heads) but also key community organizers or coalition builders who can help to create community wide buy-in or consensus. By classifying stakeholders in relation to the power they hold and their level or interest in the process, the project team will be able to create a graduated list of stakeholders by their individual relationship with the process. This will help the project team identify who to engage, inform, monitor, or persuade throughout and following the process.



F. PREPARE YOUR PARTICIPANTS

Before moving forward with workshops, touch base with the stakeholders who are going to be a part of the process. Be clear about needed commitment. Consider outlining the timeline and make sure important dates are in their calendars. Beyond logistics, this is an important step to get everyone on the same page.

Are any of the participants on the team not in agriculture? Consider setting up a time to share the experiences and needs of your agricultural community.

Internal gut check: Is everyone who should be here included? Make sure your group is representative of important groups and communities, especially those who might be underrepresented and underserved.



ENVISION

This is the part of the process where the project team and stakeholders come together in two half-day workshops. The purpose of these meetings is to define the desired future and identify strategies and tools to get there.

For your farming community, keep in mind that the two workshops might be interrupted by the farming season. That's ok! Just be sure to keep that in mind when you are planning, and be sure to take excellent notes and create action items to keep the momentum going.

Workshop 1: Defining Future

LOCATION

Decide on whether this workshop will be virtual (e.g. over Zoom) or in person. Can a participating farm host? Are there enough facilities to host guests (for example, restrooms, shade, Wi-Fi)?

- Gather the physical or virtual tools you need to capture the ideas and information of the workshop

PURPOSE

The first workshop is based in normative scenario building and will utilize visioning processes to develop a shared vision for the future in regard to your focal question or issue at hand.

- The project team and committee of stakeholders will work together in small breakout groups.
- At the end of the small group visioning sessions, the groups will come together as a large group to share and finalize a defined future.

TIMELINE

This can be executed as a daylong workshop with the first half dedicated to small groups and second half dedicated to finalizing the vision.

- Alternatively, this workshop can be split into two half-day workshops.
- Use a structure that best accommodates your stakeholders.

Generate participant ground rules or community agreements to help create an environment that fosters honesty, openness, and empathy. These will help keep participants accountable and critical while creating a welcoming environment.



Project team will introduce the project, important data and trends, and share the stories they collected from community interviews—this will help create a framework for discussion and explain what the project will address.



Based on what's been shared, ask the group a series of questions:

- Ask participants how they envision their community if trends continue.
- What would they like to see instead?
- When do they want to see that future become a reality?
- What needs to change and who is responsible for changing it?



Send them into small groups with these questions in mind and record their responses and visions for the future. They can be recorded through notes or narratives, diagrams, sketches, models, jamboards etc.



Come back together as a large group. Have a point person from each small group share their group's vision and then work together to reflect, modify, and combine these visions into one group vision that encapsulates the group's desired future.



As a group, set an initial planning horizon. When would you like to see this vision realized?

Workshop 2: Defining Scenarios

How will we reach our desired future? And what challenges await us?

Be sure to summarize what was covered in the first meeting so that everyone is on the same page.

SUMMARY

LOCATION

Decide on whether this workshop will be virtual (e.g. over Zoom) or in person.

- Gather the physical or virtual tools you need to capture the ideas and information of the workshop

PURPOSE

This workshop will help the project team and stakeholders tease out challenges to achieving the desired future and develop scenarios based on these challenges.

- This process is based in exploratory scenario planning and focuses on understanding external forces.
- Here we ground the abstractness of external forces through tools and policies.
- How might specific decisions, policies, programs, or people change the achievability of their future vision?

Process:

- Workshop participants will be split into small breakout groups with one facilitator with each group.
- **While in small groups, participants will be asked to reflect on the issues surrounding the desired future:**

What could keep us from achieving this desired future? What stands in our way?

Consider categorizing these barriers with the following categories:

Attitudes – these are social barriers. What perspectives, thoughts, or beliefs currently exist in the community that could keep us from succeeding? What narratives need to be shifted?

Systems – these are institutional barriers. What policies, programs, funding mechanisms, or practices are currently in place that keep us from achieving our desired future? What needs to be changed, removed, or added? This could include budget or capacity restraints, current land use strategies, etc. Alternatively, what policies, programs, or practices are working for us and should be maintained/enhanced?

People – these are decision makers or people with influence who might stand in the way. Who needs to be convinced or influenced? Alternatively, who are our current allies? How do we maintain them as allies and partners in our work?

Trends – this is your data. Looking at your longitudinal data (both quantitative and qualitative), what needs to be shifted or be stabilized?

Process:

- **Considering these barriers, create scenarios (different futures).**

Below are three guiding categories your organization could use to help create your scenarios: achieved, maintained, decreased.

Achieved – This is the best-case scenario. Barriers are overcome, positive relationships with people and systems are bolstered. Trends are reversing and/or stabilizing.

Maintained – How the community exists and functions stays the same. Attitudes, systems, and people remain the same—the good and the bad. Trends remain the same or are stagnant.

Decreased – This is a worst-case scenario. Barriers are not overcome and existing relationships with people and systems are weakening. Trends are worsening.



PLAN

After the workshops have been completed, your main project team will work together to create responses to the scenarios and officially set a planning horizon.

Be sure to keep in mind your team's capacity and ensure that the projects taken on are realistic! The scope of your responses to your Focal Question might be more focused or a smaller-scale. That's ok! Explore the questions below to help think through the plan.

PROCESS:

○ **Draft your response.**

Include new policies, services, initiatives, or projects and are either contingent or robust.

- **Robust: useful across scenarios** | These are responses that work well across all scenarios and can be utilized as a part of plan under most future circumstances or scenarios. These responses are preparation and proactive action that should take place although the future cannot be predicted.
- **Contingent: in specific situations** | These are responses put in place under certain circumstances where there is a large amount of uncertainty or unknowns in the situation. They are plans tailored for specific futures. For example, the number of older farmers in your foodshed is projected to decline each year, reducing local food production and making the future of available farmland uncertain. In order to utilize contingencies, you will need to establish "tipping points" or "triggers" in order to know exactly when an unknown becomes known. For example, if the ratio of farmland to developed land changes to a particular point. This would be an indicator of a more significant and more certain future.

○ **Evaluate possible costs of a tool or policy and perform financial forecasts to see how the intervention might impact local finances.**

Consider both cost and return value (social, physical, and financial)

○ **Actions and Actors.**

- Link your actions to actors—who needs to do what?
- And within what timeline?
- Then identify possible coalitions—what networks of people and organizations need to work together and strategize to achieve the actions that help us achieve the overall goal?

○ **Readdress the planning horizon.**

Given the barriers that have been discussed and the plans/decisions that have been formulated, go back to the planning horizon.

- Does it need to be shifted or changed?
- Do you need to add different planning horizons for different actions?



REFLECT

Take your scenarios back to the community for feedback and continued input
This step is important for continued buy in

PROCESS: Advertise, email, and/or set up a table at community events—this is a great opportunity to potentially engage those who were not engaged through interviews or workshops.

NOTES



