

Visioning

'Visioning' is similar to scenario planning. Visioning is a collective exercise, but can also be adapted and used in various other communication activities. The main objective is to make the problem and solution *visual*. It follows the age-old communication advice: show, don't tell.

Collective visioning exercises, carried out in a group, are used to define and help achieve a desirable future. Visioning exercises are regularly used in urban and strategic planning and allow participants to create images that can help to guide change in the city. The outcome of a visioning exercise is a long term plan, generally with a 20 to 30 year horizon. Visioning exercises also provide a frame for a strategy for the achievement of the vision. Alternatively, some visioning tools may be used to promote thought and encourage discussion of future land use and planning options, without the need to create a future orientated document.

Method

In a typical visioning exercise a facilitator asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking along their shoreline as they would like to see it in 15 years. What do they see? What do the buildings look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are they traveling? What is happening on the street? Where is the centre of the neighborhood? How does green space and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark?

People record their visions in written or pictorial form: in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages, and in written briefs. Sometimes a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify (see: http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/2_16_visioning.html). Invite the group to comment on these choices. Invite the participants to discuss what was easy and what was difficult about the process, what they learned, and how they might use the game in the future.

Uses/strengths

- Use when integration between issues is required.
- Use when a wide variety of ideas should be heard.
- Use when a range of potential solutions are needed.
- Visioning encourages participation for developing a long-range plan.
- Visioning is an integrated approach to policymaking. With overall goals in view, it helps avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing problems. Visioning uses participation as a source of ideas in the establishment of long-range policy. It draws upon deeply-held feelings about overall directions of public agencies to solicit opinions about the future.
- When completed, visioning presents a democratically-derived consensus.

Successful Communication: Packaging Tools

When using games such as 'Wheel of Coastal Fortune' as a visioning tool, this offers the following advantages:

- Can access sections of the population who are typically disempowered in traditional consultative processes (Luckie, 1995).
- Can be used to assess willingness to pay to preserve specific environmental attributes or willingness to accept the loss of these attributes.
- Can involve a broad range of participants (in demographic terms).

Special considerations/weaknesses

- Organization of the visioning exercise can be costly.
- Vision can be difficult to transfer into strategy and policy.

Source:

Coastal CRC's Citizen Science Toolbox:

www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/index.asp

Further resources on visioning

- Ames, Steven C. (1989) Charting a Course for Corvallis: A Case Study of Community Visioning in Oregon, Gresham, Oregon: American Planning Association (Oregon Chapter), Oregon Visions Project, May.
- Ames, Steven C. (1993) The Agency Visioning Handbook: Developing A Vision for the Future of Public Agencies, A Hands-on Guide for Planners and Facilitators in State and Federal Natural Resource Agencies. Arlington, Virginia: US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service Cointelligence Institute (2002) 'A Toolbox of processes for community work', see: http://www.cointelligence.org/CIPol_CommunityProcesses.html
- COSLA (1998) 'Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods', see: www.communityplanning.org.uk/documents/Engagingcommunitiesmethods.pdf
- New Economics Foundation and UK Participation Network (1998) 'Participation Works: 21 Techniques of community participation for the 21st century', see: http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_1910200062310_PWA4.doc
- US Department of Transportation (1996) Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making, see: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/vision.htm
- US Environmental Protection Agency (2002) 'Green Communities Where Do We Want To Be?', see: www.epa.gov/greenkit/3tools.htm
- Vancouver Citizens Committee and Charles Dobson, 'The Citizens Handbook', see: www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/