



Futuring Group Reports

The Futuring Process¹

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Abstract: "Futuring" is becoming a widely accepted approach to organization management and goal setting. Strategic planners for the United States military as well as the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, use Futuring to develop action plans and organizational directions for their agencies.

Futuring is a participative process that brings together several individual ideas into a collective group perspective of a preferred future. Working in small groups with the assistance of trained facilitators, people with different ideas and backgrounds use futuring to develop a Vision of a desired or preferred future.

The Vision inspires commitment from the group, guides daily decisionmaking, provides interim strategies, and suggests behavioral changes necessary to accomplish the Vision. The Visions and Strategies developed at the Symposium on Wildland Fire 2000 gave attendees something to take back to their own agencies for implementation.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

The futuring process for Wildland Fire 2000 was designed to develop a Vision of the future, and to outline a few Strategies for achieving the Vision.

Conference attendees were divided into nine topic-oriented groups, and were given the following objective:

"Through facilitated small groups, develop 10 Key Trends and 3 Key Visions that describe a preferred future in each of 9 topics."

At the close of the conference, each small group gave a presentation of their Key Visions and Strategies.

DEFINITIONS

Trends are political, social, economic and technological factors affecting wildland fire today... the direction things are heading. Trends for Wildland Fire 2000 were established during the early stages of the conference by the speakers.

Key Trends are the most significant of the trends as determined by each small group.

Implications describe what the Key Trends mean to the group... So what?

The Vision is a description or written picture of a preferred or desired future that is attainable, and serves as a guide to interim strategies, behaviors, and decisions.

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Key Visions are the most significant, consolidated versions of Visions developed by individuals in the group.

Strategies are broad, general approaches to attaining a Vision or part of a Vision.

MODEL SPECIFICS

Futuring begins by establishing the foundation of the model--the trends--affecting the organization. Then a Vision of the preferred future is developed. Each Vision is then given a pathway to implementation through the development of Strategies. Each small group in Wildland Fire 2000 went through specific steps of the process model shown below.

1. Group Introductions.
2. Discussion of the Trends as noted in the conference presentations.
3. Identification of 10 Key Trends.
4. Discussion of the Implications of the Key Trends.

5. Development of each individual's Visions of a preferred future based on the group's topic and Key Trends.

6. Identification of 3 to 5 Strategies for each of the Key Visions.

7. Appointment of a spokesperson to present a summary of the Key Visions and Strategies.

All products of these steps were recorded on flip charts by the Facilitator Team.

CONCLUSIONS

Planning has been described as a process to bring the future to the present so something can be done about the future before it gets here. Futuring is the ultimate planning tool. It provides a collective picture of a desired and preferred future, describing a Vision that serves as a beacon attracting individual actions toward the same end.