

# Activity 3.6 Anticipating Implications and (Un)Intended Consequences<sup>1</sup>

*"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful." –Margaret J. Wheatley*

## Description

This activity will explore how to imagine the possible consequences of actions. We often hear of unintended consequences. The reality is that many consequences which are thought to be unintended could have actually been anticipated.

## Learning Goals

- Participants will be able to critically analyze actions being considered and identify possible consequences in advance of implementing the actions.
- Participants will be able to develop plans for dealing with adverse actions.

## Practice (60 minutes)

Step One	<p><b><i>As a discussion group, select and review one of the following scenarios, create your own scenario, or select one from the <a href="#">What IF...Scenarios</a>.</i></b></p> <p><i>Raising Academic Standards</i> Ever since David Perick joined the college as Dean, he was on a mission to increase academic standards. Entrance requirements were raised resulting in a 20% drop in enrollment. Requirements to get into a major were raised. This resulted in a transfer rate of 10% of students from college. Pericks' latest effort was to increase the overall graduation requirement GPA from 2.00 to 2.25.</p> <p>or</p> <p><i>City of Greenmont</i></p>	10 min
----------	--	--------

<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Jack Byrd (2021). Anticipating Implications and (Un)Intended Consequences. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-3-critical-collaboration>

	The City of Greenmont was devastated by a major flood. All of the riverfront was destroyed. The city leaders decided that the need to rebuild the riverfront was an opportunity to upgrade the appearance of the city. Building codes were upgraded. Design standards were created. The Building Commission added aesthetics to one of its decision criteria for approval of new construction or major renovations. A public/private partnership was created to rebuild the city's riverfront. The project was a huge success and became a showcase for how the city could transform its appearance. This led to further changes in the city. Older buildings were condemned and replaced with structures that met the new codes, building standards, and aesthetics.	
<b>Step Two</b>	<p>In small groups, <b><i>work through the process of identifying unintended consequences.</i></b></p> <p>What could go wrong if this possibility were implemented? Record each unanticipated consequence in a bulleted list. When the group has exhausted its list, see if any like items can be combined.</p> <p>Tip: if the group is having difficulty generating ideas, encourage them to use the <a href="#">Surrounding the Topic Diagram</a>.</p>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>Step Three</b>	<p>Next ask each individual in the group to <b><i>assess the likelihood of the unintended consequences.</i></b> Do this step silently at first with each participant making an independent assessment of the likelihood. Use the following rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe this unintended consequence is very likely to occur (5 points)</li> <li>• I believe this unanticipated consequence could occur, but it's not very likely that it will (3 points)</li> <li>• I don't believe this unanticipated consequence will occur (1 point)</li> </ul> <p>Add the scores for all participants and identify which unanticipated consequences are most likely.</p>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>Step Four</b>	Take each one of the <u>most likely</u> unanticipated consequences. <b><i>Make a list</i></b> of things that could be done (strategies) to minimize the possibility that this will become an unintended consequence. Do this for all the most-likely consequences.	<b>20 min</b>
<b>Step Five</b>	<b><i>Regroup and Debrief.</i></b> Share all of the most likely possibilities with strategies to the larger group. Where are there commonalities? Which unintended consequences stand out? When can we anticipate unintended consequences? When is it less likely?	<b>10 min</b>

## Reflection Assignment

- Why is it valuable to work through this particular process in small groups? What is lost when thinking through unintended consequences in isolation?

- Take a look at your group. What types of perspectives are missing from the group? Try to imagine how someone or some viewpoint not present in your group might contribute to the discussion? Why is group diversity so important in exercises like these?

## Practice Journal

This week, select a policy idea—maybe a local or national topic. On your own, imagine that this policy is implemented. Generate a list of unintended consequences. Next, engage at least 2 other people and ask them to imagine unintended consequences of this policy idea. How did the additional insights change the initial lists? How did asking others expand your own thinking?

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Jack Byrd, “Identifying Unintended Consequences” (Forthcoming)