

Activity 2.8 Encouraging Bold Imagination

(Telling the History of the Future)

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Description

This activity asks participants to describe a positive vision for the future in regard to a complex topic—and to collaboratively imagine the pathways to achieve this desired future. Instead of getting hung up by what groups think to be “realistic” limitations, this activity helps a group to imagine boldly.

Learning Goal

- Practice positive imagination for the purpose of enacting change or improving a situation.

Instructions (55 minutes)

Set Up	Prepare for the Activity Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl). Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.	
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Jeff Prudhomme (2023). Encouraging Bold Imagination. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-2>

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<p>Step One</p>	<p>Individually Imagine the Future</p> <p>Introduce a topic or concern that is relevant for the group.</p> <p>Invite participants to individually imagine a future where this problem is solved or addressed. Invite them to imagine and quietly describe in writing (or as a drawing) what their ideal or optimal future looks like. They can project 10, 50, or 200 years into the future.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: Emphasize that you want them to develop their vision of an ideal situation, their desired future, where this problem has been solved in some way. Participants sometimes have a tendency to slip into dystopias.</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Imagine Deeper</p> <p>After an initial round of silent writing or drawing, invite participants to imagine deeper by introducing these prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you notice that indicates to you that the problem is solved? • What do you see, hear, smell, taste, feel that reflects positive change? What might be missing or absent that could also indicate positive change on this topic? • If you were to talk to someone in this future, what might they say or do that would indicate that this problem has been solved? <p>Facilitator Tip: Feel free to develop a time travel framing for this activity, i.e. “You’ve just arrived in X...during the time of Y.” Using the time travel motif can help free up participants to think more creatively by putting them in a more imaginative headspace.</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Share Visions of the Future in Small Groups</p> <p>Invite each participant to share a brief description of their ideal future with their small group. In the initial round, you want to keep it relatively brief so that everyone has time to share their vision. Stress that the group does not need to agree about what the ideal future looks like. It is likely that there will be a lot of similarities but do not push for consensus. Highlight how it can be valuable to sketch out different visions for the future.</p> <p>Possible Prompts for Small Group Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a few sentences, what’s a key feature of how the future society is dealing with the topic? • How would you summarize the way they are dealing with the topic? <p>After everyone has had a chance to present a brief description of their ideal future, open up the discussion to flesh out more of the descriptions.</p>	<p>10 min</p>

<p>Step Four</p>	<p>Bridge to the Future</p> <p>Shift the focus from imagining the future to exploring pathways for achieving this future. Keep in mind that there might be different visions of the future so it is fine to have different pathways. Ask the group to record their responses as a timeline.</p> <p>Small Group Prompt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretend that you are reading future newspapers or headlines. What sort of key events, policies, decisions, technologies, etc. had to happen to achieve this future? Think about it in steps over many years. • Imagine the different changes or developments that led to this ideal outcome. <p>Facilitator Tip: Regardless of the topic, encourage the group to think expansively, by imagining possible changes or developments in religion/spirituality, science, environment, law/ethics, technology, psychology, arts, media, governance, health, humanity, etc.</p>	<p>15 min</p>
<p>Step Five</p>	<p>Discover Anchors in the Present</p> <p>Once the group has a general sense of what has to be in place for the ideal vision of the future to function, invite participants to explore what currently exists as a starting point. Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the anchor points in the present for creating the bridge to the ideal future? What's the best of what we have now that we can build upon to get us to the ideal future? • Who or what is advancing today some of the characteristics of our ideal future? 	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Six</p>	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Review the collective vision(s) of the future and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we feel about these future visions? • What do you think are some of the most important areas to focus on in the present—if we were to build toward an ideal future? • How would you compare your attitude about positive change from before our conversation to after? 	<p>10 min</p>

Reflection Journal

- How did you experience this process of starting with a “solution” and working back to the present? What was most difficult about this process?
- How does this process encourage positive change? What take-aways would you share about how best to engage this process?

- How might current policies be different if we practiced strength-based, imaginative change practices? What are the downsides?

Practice Journal

This week, try out this exercise on a topic that you are curious about. You can encourage a few friends to imagine with you or practice on your own. You can record your thoughts using whichever medium you are most comfortable: tell the story as a grandparent recounting to a grandchild, draw a picture, or craft a poem or song illustrating the transformation.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*. Boston, Houghton, 1888.
- [Article on Political Imagination](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/02/opinion/us-politics-edward-bellamy.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR3nFvZikAL6rUrxyYPMExErS3_kvX39wNnpXX-3-tf-meE0LJWLTZU_6k): Immerwahr, Daniel. "The Strange, Sad Death of America's Political Imagination." *The New York Times*, The New York Time Company, 2 July 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/07/02/opinion/us-politics-edward-bellamy.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR3nFvZikAL6rUrxyYPMExErS3_kvX39wNnpXX-3-tf-meE0LJWLTZU_6k. Accessed 3 July 2021.

Activity Cluster

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[3.5 Seeking Divergent Thinking
\(Surround the Topic\)](#)

[5.6 Building and Shifting the Discourse](#)