

TRANSITION: BOUNCE FORWARD
What is • What if • What next?

**WHAT IF
VISIONING EXERCISE**

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“What if?”

VISIONING EXERCISE

Introduction

Radical changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are happening across society, and affecting our communities. Systems which for many people have never felt stable and reliable, are becoming even more precarious, unreliable and unsustainable. This situation is further compounded as we begin to experience worsening ecological, environmental and democratic crises and the associated problems they bring. As a result, existing ways of thinking and doing are even less able to meet the needs of our communities.

To address this we want to think about what needs to change to make our communities sustainable and just. There are aspects of our existing systems that are crucial and necessary for survival, and other things that need to change but that at present we cannot do without. A good analogy for this is that we are trying to build a new plane (or eco airship if you prefer) while it is still flying. We need to come together to work out how we create the new plane while also ensuring we are keeping it in the air.

The What if exercise is a 3 stage process that enables us to visualise and discuss the changes we want to see, for our community as a whole, or an area that we would specifically like to focus on such as food growing or community energy.

What is?

enables you to explore what is already happening, by unpacking what isn't working, what needs to change and what needs to be retained.

What if?

is where you use our Transition Time Machine to fire the collective imagination of the people present to come up with a vision for your whole community or the area of focus that you want to work on.

What next?

explores the pathways that can get you from the What If questions you have generated, to some firm ideas for future actions.

This process enables collaboration, co-design and specifically allows for tensions to emerge so that they can be worked through together in order to develop a sense of shared ownership and solidarity, setting the basis for future change to happen.

HOW THIS FITS WITH THE WHAT NEXT? SUMMIT

The What If visioning exercise is part of the Transition Bounce Forward project in Britain, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The [Transition Bounce Forward](#) project will host a 'What Next' online summit in February 2021, between the 20th and 28th, to learn more from each other about how to create change at a local level. We would really like the ideas that emerge from your group's What If visioning exercise to be brought to the What Next summit and inform what happens there. We hope the What Next summit will inform a more collective Britain-wide vision for change, as well further inspire you to think about the changes that could occur in your community.

Run **What if** with your group, then run it with your wider community?

Our recommendation is that you experiment with the What If visioning exercise with your Transition group members and associates first, before running a bigger version that could involve many people from your wider community. There could be several benefits to running this first with your group:

- Trying this out first with your group will help you to feel comfortable with running this session online, in preparation for expanding it out to wider local participation.
- It's a great opportunity for your group to come together and really work through what is going on at present where you live. The process will help you to develop a shared vision for your community, as well as the areas/themes you would like to focus on during further community engagement.
- You may be able to identify particular areas of focus for your community that you could use as the frame for a bigger, wider version.
- The What Next section of this visioning exercise can be used to explore who you will invite to a wider community visioning process. You could then begin to make contact with those people and groups, giving them plenty of notice to encourage their attendance.
- You can use the Britain-wide What Next summit in February as a further source of ideas and inspiration from other communities, to inform a subsequent wider community What If visioning exercise.

The facilitation guide below is aimed at a What If visioning exercise for your Transition group members and associates. We will soon publish the facilitation guide for this exercise at wider community level.

This facilitation guide is designed as an online process, given the current and ongoing restrictions on larger in-person gatherings.

Preparation

Decide who to invite
Define your area of focus
Preparation for activity (on and offline)

Who to invite

For the Transition group version of the What If visioning exercise we recommend that you focus on members of your Transition group, possibly extending that to others that you work closely with in your community.

DEFINING THE AREA OF FOCUS

The What if process is fractal in nature can be applied at any level so you can use it to think big as well as really focusing down on an area. We recommend focusing the visioning on all aspects of your whole community at this stage, then you could hone in on particular areas of focus when you do the activity again with the wider community.

This means you have two options for the area of focus, and both are valid. To help you decide, here's some insights born from experience:

1. Focus on all aspects of the whole community
 - a. Useful if you have never done a visioning exercise.
 - b. Can be a great way to build relationships.
 - c. Can help gain an overview of your community and how it functions.
 - d. Great for bringing in a wide range of diverse perspectives.
 - e. Helps you identify the issues and areas of interest where you want to collectively focus energy and attention. Then you can later invite the right people to a separate more focused What if process.
 - f. Challenges of this approach are that it can be too broad and not realistic in what can be achievable, so it can be useful to bear this in mind when taking this approach.
2. Take a narrower focus aimed at a specific topic area/s
 - a. Good for groups who are already focusing on an area or wish to develop activity around one, such as food growing or car use etc, or who have identified a key local issue or challenge that they would like to address.
 - b. Once you know what area you are focusing on, you can think much more broadly and imaginatively about who to invite into the process.
 - c. Could be a better option for a What If visioning exercise with a bigger number of participants from the wider community
 - d. Challenges of this approach are that it doesn't allow for a broader discussion of the whole community and change, which may mean it is not attractive to some members of our group/community.

FACILITATION GUIDE

What if Visioning Exercise - Transition group version

NB: the facilitation guide to the What If Visioning Exercise - Wider Community version will be published soon.

This facilitation guide contains everything you need to know to run this session, even if you have limited experience in doing this kind of thing, so please give it a go.

You will need the following:

- We recommend a professional Zoom account otherwise zoom calls are limited to 40 minutes". As of November 2020 that would cost **£11.99 for one month**. The benefits of using Zoom is that many people now have experience of using it and it allows for **breakout rooms** so people can do group work online.
- A way of capturing notes online: **Google Docs** can be used for this, but if you prefer not to use Google there are plenty of other alternatives out there such as **Etherpad**.
- We have created a **Google Doc template** that contains all the tables etc. that you need to capture information during the sessions - you can copy this into your own document or make a copy of it by going to file and selecting make a copy which you can then save to your google drive.

DECIDE WHEN YOU WILL RUN IT

There are two ways you can run this online:

1. Run all three sessions in one day with decent breaks - we have left break timing for you to decide and advise at least 15 minutes so people can move away from the computer to recharge a bit. You could time it so that you do stages What is and the first exercise of What if before lunch and the rest after.
2. Run it over 3 sessions on different days which breaks down to
 - a. Session 1: Intro and What is - 1 hour 45 minutes
 - b. Session 2: What if - 3 hours (3 hours 30 minutes if you do optional exercise)
 - c. Session 3: What next / check out - 2 hours 15 minutes

ASSIGN ROLES

The guide contains everything you need to know to facilitate this session, even if you have limited experience in facilitation you should be able to run it easily as it takes you through it step by step.

Ideally you would have people in the following three roles.

Facilitation: It is vital to have at least one person to facilitate and lead the process, using this guide. You could have extra facilitators, if you have capacity, who could run different aspects of the session. You will need to familiarise yourself with the activity beforehand, but it's a reasonably easy exercise to facilitate.

Zoom support: Ideally you would have someone keeping an eye on the technical aspects of Zoom. They would let people into the meeting, set up the breakout rooms, post instructions into chat at different stages, mute noisy interruptions and help participants who have questions about how to use zoom allowing the facilitator/s to focus on running the session. This role manages the breakout rooms as well which means posting timings, reminder instructions to break out groups etc. so they may not be able to engage with those aspects of the session.

Note taker / admin support: This is someone who would be responsible for capturing notes and also sorting out responses into themes at certain points in the process.

ESSENTIAL

Everyone taking on a role should read and talk through the guide before you run the sessions, so you are all clear as to what you have to do and when.

PRIOR TO MEETING

- Set up a Zoom meeting.
 - Decide as a group how you want to do the exercise - 3 sessions in one day, or splitting up the sessions over up to 3 days.
 - Decide, as a group on the date and time of the sessions.
 - Book the meeting times on Zoom and share with your group
- Ensure the person who is taking on the role of "Zoom Support" knows how to set up breakout rooms, post messages to breakout rooms and close breakout rooms
- Decide whether you want to record the meeting to watch again (can be useful for taking notes) or to share with people not present. If you do want to record the meeting you will need to ask for consent from each participant before pressing record.
- Send out an invite email to all participants the following information:
 - Date and time of the What if? Visioning sessions.
 - The introduction at the beginning of this document that outlines the session
 - The Zoom link/invitation
 - A link to the Zoom FAQ as this answers most questions on how to use it: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206175806>

Running the session

Introduce the structure of the session:

At the beginning of each section explain the aim, the process that is going to happen, and the mindset to prepare people for what they are about to do.

INTRODUCTIONS - GO ROUND

Time: 20 minutes

- Start up zoom session at least 15 minutes prior to your arranged start time.
- Participants will be placed in a waiting room by zoom, so when the facilitation team are ready, let each person into the session

Welcome everyone to the session, and if you are going to record it, let people know so that they can turn off their video if they don't want to be recorded visually. You can also ask people to answer the following question in the chat and then save the chat:

Do you agree that the recording of this webinar can be used publicly online? (Yes/No)

Give a brief overview of the whole session:

- Introductions - where we get to know each other a little.
- What is: Taking Stock - where we will explore together what's currently happening now in our communities.
- Break - to stretch legs, make a drink.
- What if - creating a vision together for our community.
- Break.
- From What If to What Next - exploring how we make our vision a reality.

Ask everyone to name themselves on Zoom in the following way: their first name followed by the group they feel most connected to (e.g. the name of their Transition group). They can do this by right clicking on their own video image and selecting rename from the drop down menu.

Then have a short go round asking people to introduce themselves, share how they are and if there's anything they need from the group today in order to participate. If there are less than 10 people you can do this verbally (one person starts and then names the person they are passing on to). If there are more than 10 people, to save time, ask participants to respond to the questions using the Zoom chat function.

Make sure everyone can access the shared google doc.
- you can do this by sharing the link in Zoom chat.

What is: taking stock

Time: 1 hour 25 minutes

FACILITATION GUIDE

1. Introduce the aim, mindset and exercise - see below

Aim:

- To explore what activities are currently helping us create a sustainable, resilient and socially just community, as well as what is stopping us doing this.

Mindset:

- You only have one part of the picture, so be open to other views to develop a more complex and realistic overview and accept you can never know everything.
 - Understand that each person's perspective of the local community at present, what needs to change and what needs to stay the same, helps you to find better solutions.
 - Multiple perspectives are fine even if they are in tension as this is the nature of complexity, the key is how you navigate those tensions together.
2. Go through the following exercise then put people into breakout rooms in groups of 1. 3-5 people for 60 minutes (ideally 20 minutes for each of the 3 areas) to go through it and to make sure that they capture the main insights of the group on the shared Google Doc as you will be sharing them with everyone.
- a. At every 20mins you can send a message to breakout rooms to prompt groups to switch focus.

What is: exercise

The idea of the 'What is' exercise is to work in small groups to take stock of the world that exists around you at this point in time. In order to do this explore the following three areas and capture the main points on to the shared google doc. It is also entirely possible that some local projects or organisations will appear in more than one list! That's ok, it's how the world currently is.

- **Resilience:** What are the things around you that contribute to the resilience of that place? What were the things that during COVID enabled the community to support itself? What have you seen, during times of shock, or flood, or heatwave or other disasters, that have enabled your community to better manage those shocks and to rebuild itself afterwards?
- **Relinquishment:** what are the things in your community that simply no longer have a place if we are to move towards a low carbon, more connected and just future? What do we need to let go of, to leave behind, to put to one side?
- **Restoration:** what needs to be put into place in order to repair the damage that has been done to our place by climate change, by austerity, inequality, biodiversity loss and so on? What are the things that already exist in this place that represent the process of restoration or have a key role to play in that process?

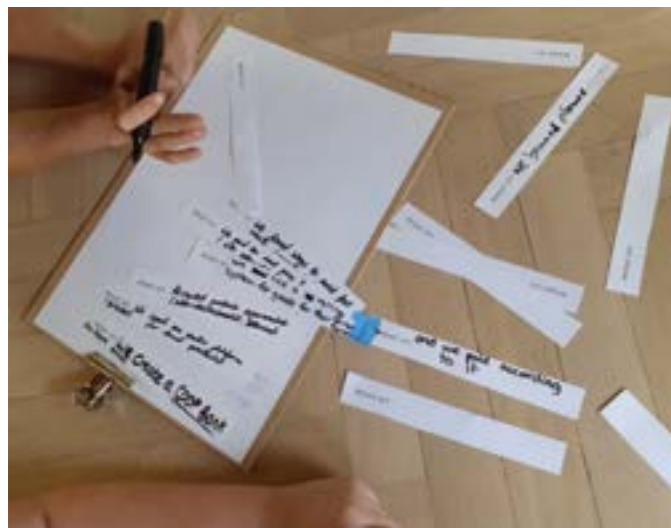
What is: exercise continues

What you will create by the end of this exercise is a kind of inventory of the place you live in 2020, of its seeds of hope, the things that are actively driving us closer to disaster, the building blocks on which the future needs to be built.

Once people have populated the Google Doc bring them back together and then ask each group to briefly feedback what they put into there. If there is time ask for comments from people on what they have heard in terms of agreement and divergence.

Break: (20/30 minutes)

Encourage people to get up and move about during the break, even go outside for a bit.



What if: harnessing your Time Machine to create a vision

Time: Up to 1 hour 15 minutes for this exercise

FACILITATION GUIDE

1. Introduce the aim, mindset

Aim:

- To use your collective imaginations to bring to life the future that may yet be possible.

Mindset:

- It is fine for there to be multiple visions, they can potentially co-exist with each other.
- We need to cultivate, in our groups, a culture of 'Yes, And' rather than 'Yes, But'.
- Seek out the ways that different visions could compliment each other.

2. Run through the following guided visioning process How to use your Time Machine to travel to 2030, this will take about 25 minutes - see below

Guided visioning process: How to use your Time Machine to travel to 2030

Invite the whole group to get comfortable, ask them to close their eyes, and to take a breath. Then one of you can read out the the following, or something similar:

"In a moment we are going to take a journey through time.

This is a historic moment, the first time in [insert name of your community] that an act of collective time travel has been attempted. I have with me here my Time Machine that I built during lockdown from bits I had in at home and using plans I found online. When I turn it on, we are going to travel forwards to 2030. The times we travel through, were the times of the most profound and remarkable transition in human history.

Change that in 2020 felt unimaginable built and built in positive and accelerating cascades. Institutions that felt so permanent in 2020 crumbled and fell, and new, infinitely better ones bloomed in their place. Those 10 years were the most thrilling time to be alive. They are times that those that came afterwards told great stories about and sang great songs about. I am turning this Time Machine on and we are travelling forwards together.

Let's step out, emerging blinking into this new world. It's not a Utopia, but it is the result of everything that could possibly have been done being done. Take a walk around it in your imagination using all your senses."

You then 'turn on' your Time Machine and leave people sitting in silence for 8 minutes to explore the future apart from an occasional prompt, with long pauses between, such as.

What do you see as you walk around?

What sounds do you hear?

What does it smell like, feel like, taste like?

What are people doing for work and leisure?

3. While people are still in the mindset of 2030 put them into breakout rooms in pairs (may need one 3 if it's an odd number) to talk to each other for 12 minutes in the world they have imagined.
 - a. Post these instructions about how long for each to talk and what to discuss into the chat function
 - i. take 3 minutes to just listen to each other without comment
 - ii. then take 6 minutes to discuss what has come up and enter two delicious ideas each that they would like to share with the wider group into the shared google doc.
 - b. Send messages to breakout rooms to prompt them to change over listening roles after 3 minutes and then to enter discussion and enter their ideas into the google doc after 6 min.
4. Then bring everyone back together and state that

"Now we're going to leave this place, taking away a sense of what's possible and what's important. Let's get back in our time machine and travel back to [date]. When you are ready, open your eyes and reconnect to the people you are with today."



Allow 20-30 minutes for this step. Ask people to take a couple of minutes to look at what has been entered into the google doc. Then ask if anyone would like to hear more about a specific idea, and give the person whose idea it was a minute or two to explain it in a bit more detail. Aim to hear more about the ideas of several participants. By the end of this people should have a pretty good overview of a range of imaginative visions for their community.

Lunch break

After the lunch break you can go straight to "Generating What If Questions", unless you want to include the optional follow-up vision exercise.

Follow up vision exercise - *Optional*

Time: 15 - 30 minutes depending on how many questions you want to explore

Once you have done this visioning piece you can do this additional exercise to go deeper into the visioning process.

FACILITATION GUIDE

1. Explain that they are now going to explore a 2030 vision in more detail by focusing on one of the following questions in small groups:

Which policies were introduced in 2020 that accelerated our journey to this future?

What are the values that underpin the world we imagined for 2030?

What jobs are you doing in this world?

What does the economy around it look like?

What were the projects and the movements in 2020 that inspired and informed this shift?

What were the key sources of inspiration?

What changes were made to the education system in 2020 that enabled this shift?

What supported people to come together in 2020 to make these changes happen?

Are there any devices or objects or tools that in 2020 didn't exist but which now, in 2030, are essential parts of life?

Invent some newspaper headlines from 2030, what positive stories would they be telling?

Put into small groups of 3-5 people in breakout rooms, where they spend 15 minutes. Ask the groups to focus on one of the following statements and discuss it for 15 minutes. Ask them to capture the main points that come up in the google doc. Then bring groups back and get them to report back, taking no more than a minute or two what they came up with.

Short break 10-15 minutes

Suggest people get up and move around or go and make a drink.



Generating What if questions

Time: 1 hour

FACILITATION GUIDE

1. Introduce the What if questions session using the following text:

The previous exercise was all about expanding out the imagination, allowing ourselves to create new 'memories of the future' in order to create a 'North Star' to move towards. But how do we give this solid form, to ground it in reality? Through the generation of good What If questions, that's how.

What makes a good What If question? The former Mayor of Bogota, Antanas Mockus, beautifully described it like this:

"What people love most is when you write on the blackboard a risky first half of a sentence and then recognise their freedom to write the other half".



2. Explain that we will now create the What If questions that people asked in 2020 that were pivotal in unlocking the 2030 that they just explored.
 - a. Encourage them to make the questions quite specific, not general things like "what if everyone loved each other?", but more specific questions that relate to changes that can be initiated at the local scale, such as "what if all our parks had community gardens?", "what if every street had a car club?" or "what if we decided on part of the council budget spend?".
 - b. Explain: it is really important at this point to distinguish between 'Yes, but' and 'Yes, and'. For so many of us, our experience of imagining new ideas and suggesting them is that they are met with a 'Yes, but' response, which shuts down our imagination. In theatrical improvisation, 'Yes, and' is vital. Someone makes an 'offer', a suggestion, and the next person accepts that and builds on it. It creates a completely different atmosphere, as ideas emerge and are nourished and respected. So make it clear that when a What If suggestion is made, 'Yes, but' is banned, instead people are invited to respond with 'Yes, and' suggestions.
 - c. Put people into breakout rooms of 3 - 5 people for 40 minutes, and ask them to capture the What If questions that occur to them into the google doc.
3. Bring everyone back together and then have a 15 minute break.
4. Over the break go through the google doc and group the What If questions into themes for use in the next exercise. This means that the note taker will not get a break at this point.

Break (15 minutes)

Encourage people to get up and move about during the break, even go outside for a bit.

From What if to What next

Time: 1hour 45minutes

FACILITATION GUIDE

1. Introduce the aim, mindset and exercise

Aim:

- To explore how to make your vision a reality.

Mindset:

- Don't drive forward from the present with its current mindset, which is the cause of a lot of the problems we face, instead position yourself in the future and let the better world emerge from that perspective.
 - There will be tensions, but they can be resolved through dialogue and collaboration.
 - Think both/and rather than either/or.
2. You will by now hopefully have a wealth of What If questions grouped together into themes on the google doc. But which ones have the potential to become viable strong initiatives, and which is there the most energy in your group for making a reality. To work this out, explain that everyone has 3 X's that they can put against a 'What If' area they would like to focus on - they can add more than X to an area if they think it's really important. Give everyone 10 minutes to look through the questions and add their X's.
 3. Then spend 10 minutes as the whole group to decide which of the popular themes to focus on in smaller groups for the rest of the session - the amount of X's next to a theme should help guide this. There can be more than one theme to focus on.
 4. Be clear that this stage is crucial, as the next steps that come out of this exercise will help to make your vision a reality. Place people in breakout rooms based on the theme/s for 60 minutes. An easy way to allocate people to the right breakout room is to ask them to rename themselves in zoom based on the area of focus, e.g. "Transport Tom", and manually assign them to rooms.

Explain that they should spend 15 minutes on each of the following questions in order to come up with some next steps/actions to make them happen which they should record into the shared google doc. Emphasise this is about next steps, not designing a whole project and that it will form their action plan for between now and March. Copy the following question into the chat so groups can still them in breakout rooms:

- Who do we need to get round the table to make it happen?
- What ideas do we want to contribute and discuss at the What Next summit?
- What resources do we need to do this?
- What could we do now?

Then bring people back together and suggest a 5 minute break. When people return, spend 15 minutes hearing each group feedback their next steps to the wider group, outlining what they hope to be doing between now and March. Also highlight the areas that you would like to see covered in the What Next summit and after the session please email them to

michaelthomas@transitionnetwork.org

NB: the facilitation guidelines below are specific to running this exercise with your Transition group members and associates. This section will be different in the What If visioning exercise - Wider Community facilitation guide that is coming soon.

Check out

Time: 30 minutes max

We would greatly appreciate it if you could make a note of the responses to point 2 below and feed it back to us so we can improve this exercise.

Close with appreciations and a celebration of what an imaginative bunch you all are and how much you achieved today!

1. Recognise that you have come up with a load of great ideas that can be taken forward when you do the visioning exercise with the wider community, as well what you could do now.
2. You can do a quick go around where you ask everyone to state one thing they have really appreciated about the session and one thing that they found challenging about the process, if there are a lot of people you can ask them to share it in the chat instead.
3. Get everyone to turn on sound and video to say bye to each other.

IMPORTANT

Don't forget to email michaelthomas@transitionnetwork.org with your ideas for topics at the summit in February and the response you gathered in the check out.

The process is inspired by Rob Hopkins' work around **What if?**, and the [3 Horizons Framework](#).

The 3 horizons framework was developed to help navigate situations where there is a high level of uncertainty and also a high level of potential for change, which means it is very much suited to the Transition movement and the times we find ourselves in.

OTHER RESOURCES

[Transition Network - Visioning a Post-Transition Future](#)

[Transition Network - Producing a Timeline](#)

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