

# **5 FROM WORKSHOP TO PRACTICE: EXTENDING FORESIGHT**

**Embedding Futures Thinking in  
Library Leadership and Culture**

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# 5. FROM WORKSHOP TO PRACTICE – EXTENDING FORESIGHT

## Embedding Futures Thinking into Leadership and Planning

Foresight isn't just a workshop—it's a mindset and a practice.

The real value of scenario planning emerges not only during the session itself, but in the habits and structures leaders build afterward. One-time exercises are helpful. But enduring strategic capacity comes from sustained attention to change, possibility, and long-term implications.

This chapter offers a set of practical activities and leadership routines to help you carry foresight forward—whether you're leading a research library, contributing to a broader university strategy, or building a more resilient team. These practices are designed to fit into your existing decision-making culture, not replace it. Some take just a few minutes. Others can be built into annual planning cycles or leadership retreats.

Think of this as your “next steps menu”: not a checklist, but a set of options to revisit, adapt, and scale. Use what's most relevant now—and return to it as your institution, your priorities, and the world continue to evolve.

The goal is simple: to ensure that the wisdom, insight, and momentum generated through this workshop becomes part of how your organization continues to look ahead—and lead through uncertainty with purpose and clarity.

# 5.1 BUILD AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

## Track weak signals and early shifts to spot emerging futures

Foresight isn't just about imagining futures—it's also about sensing when change is happening and responding with intention. An early warning system helps you track developments that might signal a shift toward one or more of the scenarios explored in this toolkit.

These systems don't need to be complicated. Even a lightweight structure—a spreadsheet, a shared document, or a quarterly review—can help your leadership team:

- Stay alert to important signals
- Recognize when assumptions are becoming outdated
- Prepare to act before disruption becomes crisis

The goal is not to predict the future but to develop situational awareness that supports agility, resilience, and readiness.

A simple early warning system helps your organization stay future-aware—not just through scenario exercises, but through regular, informed reflection on what's changing now.

# 5.1 BUILD AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM - NEXT STEPS

## Step 1: Choose Your Monitoring Focus

Start with the four 2035 scenarios used in the workshop. For each scenario, identify 3–5 signposts or indicators that might suggest that world is beginning to emerge.

Example (Scenario: Autonomous AI):

- Surge in fully AI-generated research articles
- AI tools receiving formal research co-authorship
- Decline in human-led research grants
- Universities shifting to hybrid human–AI teaching teams

You can also monitor trends unrelated to scenarios—such as AI governance, student expectations, or funding patterns.

## Step 2: Assign Scanning Roles

Decide who will monitor what. Options include:

- Individuals taking responsibility for specific themes (e.g., AI policy, tech infrastructure, research workflows)
- Rotating scanning assignments (e.g., “one signal per person per quarter”)
- External partners (vendors, faculty, students) sharing periodic insights

# 5.1 BUILD AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM - NEXT STEPS

## Step 3: Track and Share

Create a shared space to log observations—this could be:

- A Google Sheet or Notion dashboard
- A dedicated Slack or Teams channel
- A page in your strategic planning dashboard

For each entry, include:

- A short description of the signal or event and any source (link or citation)
- Implications: Which scenario(s) does this relate to? Why does it matter?

## Step 4: Make Time for Sensemaking

Build a cadence for reflection:

- Review signals quarterly in leadership or strategy team meetings
- Ask: Are we seeing movement toward any scenario? Are any assumptions changing?
- Use this as a checkpoint for adjusting strategy, resourcing, or messaging

## 5.2 MAKE ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING A HABIT

### Build awareness of change through shared observation and conversation

Environmental scanning is the practice of systematically observing the external world—watching for trends, emerging technologies, policy shifts, cultural signals, and other forces that might shape your organization's future.

While it's easy to get caught up in internal priorities, future-ready organizations develop a habit of looking outward. When scanning becomes a routine practice—not a one-time exercise—your leadership team builds a culture of curiosity, early insight, and strategic flexibility.

This activity encourages leaders to make scanning an embedded team ritual, supported by lightweight tools and inclusive participation.

When environmental scanning becomes a shared habit, your team becomes more attuned to change—and better prepared to respond with intention, not just reaction. It's one of the simplest and most powerful steps you can take to extend foresight into everyday leadership.

## 5.2 MAKE ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING A HABIT - NEXT STEPS

### **Step 1: Choose a Format That Fits Your Context**

You don't need a new committee. Build scanning into existing rhythms like monthly leadership meetings, quarterly planning check-ins and strategy retreat.

Use formats like:

- “Signal of the Month” spotlight
- “One article to share” roundtable
- “What’s shifting?” mini-brainstorm

### **Step 2: Assign Scanning Roles or Themes**

Encourage individuals to bring insights from different domains including AI developments in education and research, higher education funding or policy shifts, social, cultural, or political trends and changes in research infrastructure and publishing

Optional: Assign “rotating scanners” each month—just one person responsible for bringing 2–3 noteworthy signals for group discussion.

## 5.2 MAKE ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING A HABIT - NEXT STEPS

### Step 3: Create a Shared Scanning Log

Keep a simple, visible record of interesting observations. This could be:

- A Google Sheet or Notion dashboard
- A running document with sections by theme or date

Include for each entry a headline or short summary, a source or link and some comments on relevance (e.g., Why might this matter to us?)

### Step 4: Reflect, Don't Just Record

Make time in meetings to ask:

- What patterns are we noticing?
- Does this reinforce or challenge our current assumptions?
- What does this suggest we should explore or test?

Scanning is most valuable when it prompts conversation, not just collection.

## 5.3 CREATE FORESIGHT ROLES AND RITUALS

### Normalize long-term thinking in leadership practice

For foresight to stick, it must be socialized—woven into the culture of how decisions are made, how teams meet, and how strategy is developed. One-off workshops are valuable, but they often fade unless accompanied by deliberate roles and repeated behaviors that sustain futures thinking over time.

This activity helps leadership teams design a few simple, repeatable practices (“rituals”) and assign light-touch foresight roles to create an environment where long-term thinking becomes normal—not exceptional.

These structures don’t require major resources. They require intentionality and persistence.

By creating light, repeatable foresight roles and rituals, your organization develops a resilient leadership culture—one that watches the horizon, adapts with intention, and makes decisions with the long view in mind.

## 5.3 CREATE FORESIGHT ROLES AND RITUALS - NEXT STEPS

### Step 1: Designate a Foresight Role or Point Person

Assign someone on your leadership or planning team to:

- Keep track of signals, scanning summaries, or relevant trends
- Ensure foresight shows up on meeting agendas (even briefly)
- Act as a liaison with external trend monitors or foresight resources

A rotating “futures liaison” or “strategic foresight lead” every 6–12 months can work well.

### Step 2: Establish Recurring Foresight Touchpoints

Choose one or two moments in your annual calendar to step back and reflect.

Examples:

- A “Futures Pause” in the spring or fall semester to review scanning insights and scenario alignment
- A 30-minute scenario test of new strategies at each strategic planning cycle
- A mini-retreat every 12–18 months to revisit scenarios or run a scanning update

## 5.3 CREATE FORESIGHT ROLES AND RITUALS - NEXT STEPS

### Step 3: Add Futures Prompts to Existing Conversations

Insert a short set of questions into strategic conversations or decision points. For example:

- How might this initiative need to change by 2030?
- What happens if the future we expect doesn't arrive?
- What would we regret not exploring right now?
- Which scenario would this strategy thrive in—or fail in?

Add one of these to:

- Annual budget or hiring discussions
- Project design templates
- Capital planning or partnership evaluations
- Leadership retreats

## 5.4 REFRESH AND REVISIT SCENARIOS PERIODICALLY

### Keep your strategic assumptions aligned with a changing world

Scenarios are not predictions. They are structured tools for thinking. But like any strategic asset, they need to be revisited and revalidated over time to remain useful.

What made sense a year ago may now seem off-track—or even closer to reality than expected. Revisiting your scenarios periodically helps you:

- Reflect on what's changed in the external environment
- Spot new drivers or emerging tensions
- Realign strategic direction with the realities unfolding around you

This is not about rewriting everything. It's about maintaining strategic relevance and situational awareness as conditions evolve.

A regular scenario refresh ensures that your long-term strategy is still anchored in relevant futures thinking. It builds organizational memory, encourages strategic humility, and strengthens your capacity to navigate complexity over time.

# 5.4 REFRESH AND REVISIT SCENARIOS PERIODICALLY - NEXT STEPS

## **Step 1: Schedule Scenario Reviews Annually or Biannually**

Pick a cadence that works for your leadership rhythm—every 12 or 18 months is ideal. Build it into strategic plan updates, offsite retreats or as a standalone exercise.

Make it a light touch, high insight session—no need to run the full workshop again unless you're ready to expand or reengage the organization.

## **Step 2: Use a Simple Scenario Check-In Framework**

For each of the four scenarios, ask:

- Does this still feel plausible? More or less than before?
- Have any new events, trends, or signals aligned with this scenario?
- Do we see evidence of multiple scenarios unfolding at once?
- Which of our strategies are still resilient across these futures?

You might color-code or rate each scenario based on its perceived trajectory, salience, or strategic relevance.

# 5.4 REFRESH AND REVISIT SCENARIOS PERIODICALLY - NEXT STEPS

## Step 3: Identify Needed Updates or Additions

If your scenarios feel significantly out of sync, you may want to:

- Revise key drivers or assumptions
- Create a new “fifth” scenario based on fresh insights
- Run a mini-refresh workshop with a smaller group of leaders or planners
- Add wild cards, signals, or use cases to re-energize thinking

Don't assume your original framing will last indefinitely. Scenario thinking should grow with your institution.

Use your environmental scanning and early warning system activities as inputs to the scenario review.

Engage new voices (emerging leaders, students, partners) when you revisit to gain fresh insight.

Don't be afraid to retire a scenario that no longer feels relevant—but reflect on why this has happened.

## 5.5 INTEGRATE FORESIGHT WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGETING

### Make long-term thinking a core input to near-term decision-making

Strategic plans and budget frameworks often operate on short timelines and fixed assumptions. But in a volatile and fast-changing world, that approach risks overconfidence in a single future.

Integrating foresight into these processes allows leadership teams to:

- Stress-test new initiatives before committing resources
- Identify actions that are robust across multiple futures
- Balance innovation, resilience, and risk
- Spot mismatches between resource allocation and emerging conditions

This activity offers ways to embed scenario thinking and futures literacy into existing planning and budgeting workflows—without starting from scratch. When foresight becomes part of how you plan and budget, your organization becomes more agile, more resilient—and more intentional about how it invests in its future.

# 5.5 INTEGRATE FORESIGHT WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGETING - NEXT STEPS

## Step 1: Use Scenarios to Test Proposed Initiatives

When reviewing strategies, proposals, or major investments, ask:

- How would this hold up in each of our four 2035 scenarios?
- Which assumptions is this strategy built on? Are those stable or uncertain?
- Does this strategy make us more resilient—or more dependent—on a particular future?

Use the same rating system from earlier (1–5 scenario fit) or run a mini-wind tunnel session (see section 3.4).

## Step 2: Align Budgets with Robust and Contingent Strategies

Use budgeting conversations to prioritize:

- Robust strategies that perform well across scenarios
- Contingent strategies that may need staged investment or flexible funding
- Watchpoints where funds could be released if certain signals emerge

Map strategic proposals to your scenario portfolio matrix (from Section 4.1) and impact/difficulty analysis (from Section 4.3) to guide resource decisions.

# 5.5 INTEGRATE FORESIGHT WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGETING - NEXT STEPS

## Step 3: Add a Foresight Layer to Annual Planning

Insert a “futures lens” into:

- Annual planning templates (e.g., add one question: What future conditions would change this plan?)
- Departmental goal-setting
- Capital project evaluations
- Cross-functional strategy meetings

Create a norm where all strategic submissions consider long-term alignment—not just short-term feasibility.

## Step 4: Use Scenario Frameworks for Risk and Resilience Reviews

At least once per year, convene leadership to ask:

- Which of our current strategies are most vulnerable in a disruptive future?
- Are we overcommitted to one set of assumptions?
- What hedges, options, or experimental efforts should we keep in play?

## 5.6 FOSTER A CULTURE OF FORESIGHT

### Extend futures thinking into conversations, habits, and relationships

Foresight thrives when it's not confined to workshops or strategy documents—but instead shows up in how people think, collaborate, ask questions, and solve problems.

This activity offers a menu of lightweight, culture-building practices that signal to staff, faculty, and partners that your organization is serious about long-term thinking. These practices don't require major budgets or new roles. What they require is intentionality, leadership modeling, and repetition.

Over time, these behaviors can help turn foresight from an event into a mindset—from something a few people do into something everyone values.

When foresight shows up in conversation, design, learning, and partnership, it becomes part of your institutional identity—not a separate agenda, but a mindset for how you lead in an uncertain world.

What follows are small moves can be adopted one at a time. Choose what fits your team, timing, and culture—and experiment.

## 5.6 FOSTER A CULTURE OF FORESIGHT - NEXT STEPS

### 1. Host a Quarterly “Signal Spotlight”

Invite one or two staff members, students, or external partners to share a trend, tech, policy shift, or cultural signal that may shape the future of research, learning, or libraries. Allow 15–30 minutes in a regular meeting. Ask:

- Why does this matter?
- What assumptions does it challenge?
- Which of our scenarios does it resonate with?

### 2. Launch a Futures Learning Circle or Book Club

Choose readings—books, articles, reports—on topics like AI, higher ed futures, digital ethics, design, or strategic foresight. Meet every 6–8 weeks. Use simple prompts like:

- What surprised you?
- What should we rethink in our current strategy?
- What futures does this invite us to consider?

## 5.6 FOSTER A CULTURE OF FORESIGHT - NEXT STEPS

### 3. Develop a “Futures Briefing” Process

Create a 1–2 page update every quarter (or twice a year) that summarizes:

- Key trends or events on your radar
- Implications for your library, university, or users
- One scenario that feels newly relevant
- Questions for leadership reflection

Use this as a lightweight input to retreats, donor meetings, or planning sessions.

### 4. Engage Campus Partners in Scenario Thinking

Adapt the toolkit for use with:

- Academic departments and research centers
- Student leadership
- Faculty committees

Co-run short scenario discussions or scanning workshops with your campus partners. Use this to build shared mental models and strengthen alignment.

## 5.6 FOSTER A CULTURE OF FORESIGHT - NEXT STEPS

### 5. Use Futures Questions in Hiring, Retreats, or Design Work

#### Integrate long-range thinking into everyday choices. Examples:

- Ask job candidates: “What’s a technology you think will change this field in 10 years?”
- In service design: “If this system still exists in 2035, will it serve us well?”
- In retreats: “What would we regret not experimenting with now?”

These questions signal values, build curiosity, and support strategic awareness.

#### Across all of these ideas:

Start with one practice and try it three times—repetition builds comfort

Invite participation across levels and roles—make foresight inclusive

Highlight when someone brings a “future-focused” question or idea—model and reward the behavior

# REFERENCES

Hancock, T., & Bezold, C. (1994). Possible futures, preferable futures. *The Healthcare Forum Journal*, 37(2), 23–29.