

Identifying Policy Challenges and Opportunities – Facilitator’s Guide

OBJECTIVE: TO IDENTIFY THE POLICY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM POTENTIAL SCENARIOS.

This brainstorming exercise identifies policy challenges and opportunities that could arise from previously developed scenarios. In about 3–4 hours, a group of 16–32 participants (in a combination of breakout groups and plenary sessions) can identify policy challenges and opportunities in each scenario and prioritize the most significant ones for policymakers to consider.

People:

- 1 plenary facilitator, 4 breakout facilitators
- 16–32 participants (Ensure 4–8 participants per scenario)
- 1 notetaker (optional)

Materials:

In the plenary room:

- Projector/computer or flipchart

In each breakout room:

- Fine-tip marker and pen for each participant
- Notepad for each participant
- Flipchart
- Projector/computer (optional)
- Evaluation form, or 2 sticky notes per person for feedback (optional)

Post on the wall:

- Definition of a policy challenge and opportunity (optional)
- A visual agenda (optional)
- Rules of engagement (optional)
- 2 headings on sticky notes (optional): What worked? What could be better?

Meeting Space:

A large room with a writable/papered wall, several flipcharts and/or computer screen to post policy challenges and opportunities. Seating for all conducive to both hearing other participants and seeing the wall (or computer screen).

Agenda at a Glance

TIME	ACTIVITY
5 minutes	1. General meeting introductions (if needed)
3 hours and 15 minutes	2. Give context for the policy challenges exercise (1 min) 3. Provide instructions for the exercise (4 mins) 4. Guided imaging exercise (10 mins) 5. Explore challenges and opportunities (90 mins) 6. Narrow down the most significant challenges/opportunities (30 mins) 7. Identify challenges/opportunities across scenarios (60 mins) 8. Summarize points of policy challenges/opportunities exercise (1 min)
10 minutes	9. Reflect on and/or evaluate the exercise
EST. TOTAL TIME: 3.5 hours	

BEFORE THE MEETING: PLAN THE WORKSHOP

For a project with a large group of participants (e.g. 16–32), this guide suggests dividing the group into four concurrent sessions to identify the policy challenges and opportunities in each scenario. For a smaller group of participants, it may be necessary to involve participants in all scenarios or half of them, perhaps over several meetings. In our experience, scenario discussions (where brainstorming occurs) work best in small groups of about 4–8 participants to generate enough creativity but still fully engage all participants.

Since this is a long workshop (3–4 hours), consider offering some breaks at convenient times. A good rule of thumb is to allow participants a 10 minute break for each hour of work.

Prepare the room

- Each participant will need a chair, writing surface and a clear sightline to the wall. Policy challenges and opportunities can be recorded on sticky notes. Consider having on hand several movable flip charts to collect policy challenges and opportunities that will be voted on at the end.
- For a larger group (e.g. 20), seating participants facing each other around a single large table(s) can help to ensure all are seen and heard. With a large group and room, it is also a good idea to have one to two runners who can support the facilitator by collecting the sticky notes and arranging them on the wall.
- Develop and post in the room any visual aids that will be referred to in the meeting.
- Ensure each participant has three large sticky notes, with extras close at hand. Sticky notes should be large enough to clearly fit about 8 words.

Alternative to sticky notes: If there is a projector in the room, a notetaker can type the policy challenges and opportunities that participants raise in the meeting. Allowing participants to review and reformulate policy challenges as they are being recorded works well. This is a good choice if the policy challenges and opportunities activity is one of several facilitated activities in a day involving sticky notes.

ANNOTATED AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	NOTES
5 minutes	<p>1. In Plenary - General meeting introductions (if needed)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce facilitators • Provide context for the session (why are we here?) • Allow participant introductions if they are unacquainted • Consider adding a few minutes to the agenda to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ build rapport through an ice-breaker activity ◦ review or develop a list of ground rules on the wall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this is one of several activities, consider using a visual agenda to situate this activity within the day's events. • A list of "rules of engagement" posted in the room during the meeting is a visual reminder of the group's commitment to support a good discussion.
1 minute	<p>2. Give context for the policy challenges and opportunities exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A policy challenge is an issue that current policies or institutions may not be ready or able to address. A policy opportunity is something that could potentially be leveraged to an organization's advantage. It may require some strategic thinking now in order to harness or maximize the benefits of this opportunity." • "Surfacing emerging policy challenges and opportunities allows decision-makers to develop more robust strategies and policies." • "It also allows us to question our fundamental assumptions about specific issues and come up with more robust assumptions that can help in the development of effective policy." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider having a 'parking lot' for assumptions that come out of the policy challenges and opportunities exercise.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Through this exercise, we will identify, analyze, debate and clarify the policy challenges and opportunities arising out of each of the scenarios we have created.” 	
4 minutes	<p>3. Provide activity instructions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “In this activity, we will break up into four groups: one for each scenario.” “In each group, we will conduct a guided imaging exercise to help you get into the space of your scenario.” “Once you have a good image of what this future looks like, we will ask you to think about potential challenges and opportunities that may arise in this world.” “We will discuss and prioritize the policy challenges and opportunities that you consider most worth the attention of policymakers.” “When we reconvene (see notes), we’ll share our lists and discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by each scenario. (Horizons finds that it’s easiest if the facilitators synthesize the material and report back in plenary).” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have participants assigned to particular scenarios or allow them to choose their groups. For continuity, consider requesting that those who were part of an earlier scenario development exercise remain with the same scenario. Adjust the number of participants if a group is too small or large and consider backgrounds/expertise if pre-assigning people to groups. You may or may not want to reconvene in plenary.
10 minutes	<p>4. Guided imaging exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During this visualization exercise, the facilitator will describe what is happening in a particular scenario according to the scenario logic, change drivers and system elements developed in previous sessions. (See the guided imaging facilitator’s guide in module 3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to the guided imaging facilitator’s guide in module 3 for suggestions on how to conduct this exercise. For example:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout the guided imaging exercise and especially at the conclusion, the facilitator can prompt participants to explore challenges and opportunities through questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What are some significant discontinuities or surprises that are occurring in this scenario? ◦ What are the consequences for different actors (governments, private sector, non-governmental sector, communities, investors, trade partners, citizens, etc.)? ◦ How are various stakeholders (e.g. people, organizations, institutions, states) responding to this change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are they struggling with in this scenario? - What kind of opportunities are emerging? ◦ What are the implications for social, economic, environmental and security policies and institutions? • Make sure to leave a pause (1–2 minutes) for participants to explore the answers in their minds. • Indicate when the guided imaging exercise is coming to a close. E.g. “Take one last minute to look around and investigate a question that interests you. Then, when you are ready, open your eyes.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The annotated agenda provides context for the exercise and explains how to conduct the relaxation exercise that precedes a guided imaging session. ◦ See the appendix for information on how to draw on the scenario logic to lead a guided imaging exercise. • It may be useful to give participants handouts that describe the particular scenario logic. These can be provided after the visualization exercise to help facilitate the discussion and remind participants of different aspects of the scenarios. An alternative would be to post the completed scenario matrix on the wall.
up to 60 minutes	<p>5. Explore challenges and opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When most or all participants’ eyes are open, invite them to return to the present moment and record their visions on paper before they forget them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider having a notetaker record the main points, rather than using stickies.

- “What policy challenges or opportunities did you see? Write as much as possible of what you recall.”
- Give participants a few minutes to record their thoughts.
- After participants have had a chance to record their ideas, ask them to read out the policy challenges and opportunities they saw and put them on sticky notes. This can be done sequentially around the room or by inviting participants to speak up with a policy challenge/opportunity as they are ready (“popcorn style”). The facilitator can prompt participants to elaborate on their policy challenge/opportunity so that everyone in the room has a good understanding of it. Record the results in point form on a flip chart.
- The facilitator can create some continuity of themes by inviting others to voice similar challenges/opportunities. E.g. “Did anyone else see a similar challenge/opportunity during the visualization exercise?” Alternatively, the facilitator can allow each participant to share all of the policy challenges and opportunities they saw before moving on to the next person. Over the course of the discussion, participants may move beyond their recollections to identifying new challenges and opportunities. They may build on one another’s ideas or contrast them in order to sort out the scenario. Allow this to happen.
- Suggestions:
 - It may help the facilitator to have a list of appropriate policy areas in their back pocket in order to prompt for a range of
- At the conclusion of the guided imaging exercise, participants will very quickly forget what they saw. To aid recall:
 - Let them immediately jot down their observations for themselves.
 - Avoid asking them for their “best” ideas — if they analyze their thoughts, it will slow down recollection.
 - Refrain from speaking while they are writing. Know that participants will also recall points as the discussion unfolds - watch for when a participant wants to add a point to another’s observation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ It is often easier to identify challenges than opportunities. If few opportunities were identified, ask participants again if they can think of any. • If the discussion was recorded on several flipcharts, post them all side by side on a wall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that we are particularly interested in challenges and opportunities that current policies and institutions are not in a good position to address. This will allow us to question our fundamental assumptions underpinning policy today and help develop more robust assumptions (described in the “Testing Assumptions” facilitator’s guide – module 6).
30 minutes	<p>6. Narrow down the most significant policy challenges and opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If participants have generated a large number of policy challenges and opportunities, they can vote to prioritize the most important ones (using sticky dots or markers). To place their votes, participants are asked to consider the following question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “Which of these policy challenges/opportunities are most important for institutions to address?” • Once everyone has voted, the facilitator can highlight the top three to five policy challenges/opportunities and engage the participants in a discussion on why they are significant. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an opportunity for the facilitator to learn more about current conditions and it may highlight assumptions participants have about the future. Some questions the facilitator could ask include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ “What institutions/departments/policies could be most affected by this challenge/opportunity?” ◦ “What would happen if they weren’t prepared for this?” ◦ “What could prevent them from responding?” • As the discussion is winding down, the facilitator/notetaker can write down the top five policy challenges/opportunities on flipchart paper to share in the plenary session. • Wind down the discussion five minutes before the end of the exercise by asking for any final thoughts and then transitioning to the voting part of the exercise. 	
60 minutes	<p>7. Identify policy challenges and opportunities across scenarios</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief on scenarios (5–7 minutes per group, 20–30 minutes total) • When the breakout groups reconvene, ask each reporter to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Briefly describe their scenario ◦ Outline the top five challenges/opportunities within that scenario • Invite discussion (30–40 minutes) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask participants for their thoughts on some of the policy challenges and opportunities that are common across all four scenarios. Encourage participants to brainstorm new ones as well. Make a list of common policy challenges on a flip chart or the computer screen (ensure it is visible to all participants). 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And/or, you could also ask participants other questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What surprised you? ◦ What struck you as especially important to address? Was there anything that you think is not a priority? Anything you'd like to understand better? 	
1 minute	<p>8. Summarize points of policy challenge/opportunities exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The main point of this exercise was to identify specific challenges and opportunities that may play out in different scenarios of the future. This allows us to identify policy areas that may not be ready for the range of futures we’ve explored.” • If appropriate, the facilitator could commit to posting the policy challenges/opportunities in a shared space (e.g. a shared network folder, a workplace wall) and invite participants to continue to add to them over the course of the relevant project. 	
10 minutes	<p>9. Reflect on and/or evaluate the exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the exercise. • This might take the form of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A Q&A discussion ◦ Participant completion of an evaluation form ◦ Informal evaluation—On their way out the room, participants are asked to post one comment on a sticky note for each of three wall headings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What Worked? - What Could be Better? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide evaluation forms or sticky notes as appropriate.

Building a Foresight Workshop: Complementary Activities to Consider

For facilitators with multiple objectives for a foresight workshop (perhaps a full-day event), below are a few suggestions of activities that would pair well with the delivery of a policy challenges and opportunities exercise.

Before the policy challenges and opportunities exercise

- Deliver the [Scenarios presentation \(see module 6\)](#).

After the exercise

- [Assess the robustness of policy assumptions](#).

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