

Guided Imaging Exercise – Facilitator’s Guide*

OBJECTIVE: TO USE GUIDED IMAGING TO TAP INTO IMAGINATION AND INTUITION.

This is a visualization exercise that helps participants draw on their intuition to consider plausible futures. Guided imaging can be applied at various stages in the foresight process to support participants’ exploration of future implications. The visualization component may take about 5 minutes, followed by a 30-45 minute discussion, depending on the number of participants.

People:

1 facilitator

A small group is best (up to 7 people)

1 recorder (optional; usually a second facilitator, rather than a participant)

Materials:

- Guided imaging script/notes
- Pen and notepad for each participant
- Flip chart and thick markers for facilitator/recorder

Post on the wall:

- A visual agenda (optional)
- Rules of engagement (optional)
- 2 headings on sticky notes (optional): What worked? What could be better?

Meeting Space:

A quiet room with comfortable seating for all, conducive to hearing the facilitator and other participants, and a large wall to collect flip chart notes.

Agenda at a Glance

TIME	ACTIVITY
5-10 minutes	1. General meeting introductions (if needed)
60 minutes	2. Give context for the guided imaging exercise (3 minutes) 3. Provide instructions for the exercise (2 minutes) 4. Relax, visualize and reflect on the future (10 mins) 5. Discussion: explore what surprised participants about the future (30 minutes) 6. Summarize key points from guided imaging exercise (1 minute)
10 minutes	7. Reflect on and/or evaluate the exercise

EST. TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes

* Also see the [Guided Imaging Tip Sheet](#) in Module 1.

BEFORE THE MEETING

When to use a guided imaging exercise

Guided imaging is an experiential tool. In foresight, it allows participants to tap into their intuitions and imaginations to explore plausible future outcomes. There are three points in the Horizons Foresight Method in particular where we suggest using guided imaging to prepare participants for a brainstorming session (see Appendix for further detail):

1. Before a [cascade diagram discussion](#) (modules 3 and 5).
2. Before fleshing out a [scenario with participants](#) (module 6).
3. When presenting foresight study conclusions, to engage new audiences with complex content and to identify new implications.

At these stages, guided imaging may be used to highlight key ideas gathered so far and to allow participants to quietly reflect on them.

Build a guided imaging script using content generated in the study

The appendix of this guide includes an example of a guided imaging script for each of the above purposes. (Also see the [tip sheet on guided imaging in module 1](#), which includes a general script for introducing guided imaging). In some cases, a guided imaging exercise can be led without a carefully crafted script; it can be as impromptu as a facilitator reviewing points raised in an earlier discussion and then asking participants to visualize them. However, the facilitator will likely want to prepare some points in advance to draw upon selectively, and may even read a highly constructed narrative script.

To draw participants into the visualization exercise, it is helpful to provide cues that involve the senses (what are the sights, sounds, or smells?), particularly at the start of the exercise. However, be careful not to overload participants with too much detail or prescription about what the world looks like; let them use their imagination. The guided imaging script is a scaffold for participants to fill in details that will be the focus of discussion. A balance can be achieved by mixing inconsequential details (e.g. “you step off the plane to find it is a bright, warm day”) with general statements and open-ended questions around the policy issues to be explored (e.g. “Cyber-breaches are a frequent occurrence. What does that look like? How are people responding?”). To allow for a good wrap-up discussion, the script writer should be clear about what points can be assumed/prescribed in the visualization (often these are conclusions from a previous discussion) and what implications can be left open for participants to explore.

Prompt with policy questions

At any time in a guided imaging exercise, and particularly at the end, the facilitator may wish to prompt participants to explore challenges and opportunities for Canadian policy. It is important to leave a pause for participants to do this. Possible questions for them to explore in their minds include:

- Do you see any significant discontinuities or surprises that could occur?
- What will Canada be struggling with in this scenario?
- What kind of opportunities do we see emerging for Canada in this scenario?
- What are the implications for the social, economic, environmental and security of Canada?
- What are the implications for various departments?
- What are the implications for provinces/territories or federal–provincial–territorial relations?
- What implications do you see for Canada's role in the world?
- What are the implications for demographic groups (youth, Indigenous communities, seniors, new Canadians)?

Test the guided imaging script

If the guided imaging script is long (closer to 5 minutes than 1 minute), consider a test run of the activity with colleagues. After discussing what they saw, ask for any observations on the pace of the delivery, the quality of imagery, parts of the script that worked and didn't work, etc. A long guided imaging exercise may need to be revised several times until it is just right. If you are reading the guided imaging exercise directly from a script, remember to speak very slowly and pause at points where participants are to reflect and fill in details, such as after a question. It may also be helpful to record yourself reading the guided imaging script in order to play it back and try it yourself; it is very easy to read too quickly.

Prepare the room for the activity

- Each participant will need a comfortable chair. A writing surface with a notepad or sticky notes would also be helpful for participants to record their thoughts after the visualization exercise. The activity is best with a small group of participants seated near the facilitator so he/she can deliver the imaging exercise with a soft, calm voice.
 - If the facilitator will be recording impressions of what participants imagined on a flipchart, then it will need to be set up prior to the session.
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ANNOTATED AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	NOTES
5 minutes	<p>1. 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.
3 minutes	<p>2. Give context for the guided imaging exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The human mind has an amazing capacity to visualize very complex things. Everyone has the innate capacity to see images, manipulate them, and run simulations of how different situations or strategies could play out. This is key in foresight, as we want to uncover the mental models of how people think of the world and how they envision the future.” • “We use guided imaging exercises as a way to tap into our imagination and intuition. Through visualization, we have the capacity to create new content, and to explore and see things we may overlook in the present.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure participants have confidence that a guided imaging exercise is a useful activity in foresight, it may be useful to discuss any prior instances where you have used guided imaging in foresight successfully.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Guided imaging exercises can rather quickly lead us to transformational future possibilities with implications for present-day actions and policy.” • “In a nutshell, the point of the exercise will be to surface your mental models about the future. Some of you may find this activity strange, especially in the context in which we usually work, but for it to be effective, it is important to disconnect from the stresses of life so that you are relaxed and your mind is open. It is in this state that creativity resides. This visualization exercise provides you with a framework to tap into your intuition—your unconscious mind—to make novel connections.” 	
2 minutes	<p>3. Provide activity instructions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In a moment, we are going to shut off the lights and lead you through the guided imaging exercise.” • “First, we will go through a relaxation component to get your mind in a calm state. The purpose of relaxation is to let go of expectations and turn off the critical mind. Turning off the critical mind is key to success in this exercise.” • “Then, we will take you on a mental journey into the future. Your task is to just let your mind naturally surface whatever comes.” • “We will give you some time at the end to do a mental summary and record the thoughts that came to your mind. Please keep your eyes closed until we say to open them.” 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you would like to provide a simple demonstration of a guided imaging exercise, this may prove useful: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ask participants to shut their eyes and observe how the mind answers certain general questions. Keep the question simple, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “How many doors are in your home? How many windows are in your kitchen?” - Ask participants to observe what happened. We are not looking for the specific number of windows or doors here, only a demonstration that they use visualization in every aspect of their lives and that it is a natural and common tendency, even if we are not aware that we are doing it. ◦ Another simple question is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Picture someone is in the kitchen with you. Ask them a question about something you would like to know.” - Indicate that we often use such mental movies to inform our actions. Before an important conversation, we can anticipate likely responses and then decide how we want to approach the subject. 	
10 minutes	<p>4. Relax, visualize and reflect on the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxation: Use sensory images to get people to relax. Ask participants to do the following: 	

- “Close your eyes and think of a place that makes you calm.”
- “Relax in your chair, feel your back against the chair, feel your feet against the floor, and your arms at your sides.”
- “Relax your forehead. Relax your jaw. Relax your shoulders and neck. Relax your hips.” (These are the places that hold the most tension for people.)
- “Concentrate on your breath. Take a deep breath in. And take a deep breath out.” (Repeat deep breathing—in and out—three times.)
- “Try to imagine that your stresses, your anxieties, your deadlines, are rolling off your head, down your shoulders, down your arms, and falling away to the floor.”
- “Acknowledge your thoughts as they flow by, but turn your attention back to your breath.”
- “Keep your eyes closed.”
- **Visualization:** Ask participants to imagine themselves in the future (e.g. 15 years ahead) specific to the domain or system under study:
 - Use the guided imaging script to describe what is happening in this particular future.
 - After all imagery has been presented, conclude with a few important questions for participants to ponder.
- Make sure there is no external noise when conducting the guided imaging exercise. Shut all doors and alert staff that quiet is required over the course of the exercise, if necessary. This will limit distractions for participants.
- It may also be useful to put on some “meditation music” to get participants in a relaxed state.
- If reading the guided imaging exercise directly from a script, remember to speak very slowly and to pause at points where participants are to reflect and fill in details, such as after a question.
- Occasionally someone in the room finds it difficult to get into the headspace of a guided imaging exercise. This isn’t an issue, as the discussion uses the guided imaging only to start the conversation. During debriefing, participants will be brainstorming a shared vision, building on the input of others.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ask participants to take a minute to review in their heads what they have seen and develop a few short headlines to describe the most interesting or significant changes they saw. • Reflection: Allow participants to quietly reflect and record personal notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ask participants to open their eyes when they are ready. ◦ Give participants a minute or so to collect their thoughts and write down headlines debriefing what they saw before asking them to share content with the group. 	
30 minutes	<p>5. Discussion: explore what surprised participants in the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask participants to take a few minutes to quickly take notes for themselves about what they observed during the guided imaging exercise. Observations will then be shared in discussion. • Go around the room and ask participants to each share what surprised them in the future. Ask them to summarize a key point and describe why they thought it was significant. Some simple questions to ask include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ What surprised you about what you saw in the future? ◦ What was the same as today? ◦ What was quite different from today? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider having a recorder write discussion points on a flip chart. An advantage of having a recorder is that it leaves the facilitator free to interact with participants. However, a recorder may not always accurately capture what is on the mind of the facilitator. Working with a recorder also requires more coordination and communication than having just one person facilitating and recording.

- Minimize cross-talk in order to move quickly through the exercise (especially if there is a large number of participants), and generate a broad range of surprises in a short time.
- Material from the visualization exercise is only needed to initiate discussion; at a certain point, participants will likely form new connections as others share what they see. Allow this brainstorming to happen and record it.
- If there are specific topics the facilitator would like participants to discuss, it is helpful to have a checklist of themes ready to use as prompts.
- If the facilitator raises a topic that no one had considered, ask them to now reflect on it, in light of other details that have been discussed.

Suggestions:

- To collect participants' surprises from the future, the facilitator could ask for one or two ideas per person, going sequentially around the room, or invite participants to speak up with an idea as they are ready ("popcorn style"). With either approach, the facilitator can create some continuity of themes by inviting related ideas/surprises about the future. E.g. "Did anyone else have an idea of the future similar to the last one (summarize idea)?"

- To engage all participants and ensure discussion is not dominated by one or a few, consider:
 - Asking for one consequence from each person.
 - Reminding participants to be concise and to share the time.
 - Seeking input from participants who speak up less often.

1 minute**6. Summarize points of guided imaging exercise**

- “This guided imaging exercise is one way to relax the mind so it can enter a creative state that may help us better understand the future. It allows us to tap into our intuition and imagination to help construct alternative scenarios that may be different from the expected future. Through sharing and discussing these surprises with others we can get a better sense of how the future may unfold. With a broader consideration of plausible futures, we can test the robustness of current assumptions underlying policy.”
- If participants ask for more information about how Horizons uses guided imaging in our process, here is a possible response:
 - “We can use guided imaging throughout many of the steps in the Horizons process. However, we mainly use guided imaging to help construct alternative scenarios of the future.”

10 minutes

7. Reflect on and/or evaluate the exercise

- Give participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the exercise.
- This might take the form of:
 - A Q&A discussion
 - Participant completion of an evaluation form
 - Informal evaluation—On their way out of the room, participants are asked to post one comment on a sticky note for each of two wall headings:
 - What Worked?
 - What Could Be Better?

- Provide evaluation forms or sticky notes as appropriate.

Building a Workshop: Complementary Activities to Consider

As noted, guided imaging is a tool that can support a [cascade diagram exercise](#) (module 3 or module 5) or a [scenario exercise](#) (module 6), or it can be used to communicate foresight findings to a new audience (e.g. it may be used before a [Three Horizons exercise](#)).

APPENDIX: Three examples of how to use guided imaging

This appendix includes examples of the three most common ways that Horizons uses guided imaging, although guided imaging can be a useful tool at any point in the foresight process.

1. Cascade diagrams

In the [scanning phase](#) (module 3) and [change driver phase](#) (module 5), guided imaging can catalyze a [cascade diagram](#) discussion by helping participants quickly explore the plausible future implications of a

weak signal or change driver (see [cascade diagram exercises for a weak signal](#) and [change driver](#)).

Example 1: Guided imaging for a cascade diagram discussion

After participants have discussed the qualities of a weak signal (or a change driver), an impromptu guided imaging exercise can contribute ideas for a cascade diagram. Guided imaging interrupts thinking about the present and moves the discussion into a future context. It starts with a weak signal (or change driver) and assumes it continues to grow over the next 10 - 15 years. In a relaxed state, participants can quickly form creative, plausible ideas about the future.

“We’ll start with some guided imaging to identify some implications of our weak signal. This is a useful way to tap into the insight we have about the future. We’re going to assume that our weak signal develops into a significant shift and consider what that future might look like. Close your eyes. Feel your feet on the floor. Relax your shoulders. Take a deep breath in....and out. Relax your eyes... your cheeks... your jaw.

Imagine that it is now 2030, and **[this weak signal]** has developed into a more widespread change in the world **[summarize some of the features the group just discussed]**.

[Prompt participants with other relevant changes that help describe how 2030 is different from today]: Take a walk around. Notice that we are an older society. Our economy is more globalized. There is greater use of artificial intelligence and robotics.

[Ask questions, such as those below:]

- Where do you see [the weak signal’s change] occurring? What parts of the [economy/society/world] are impacted?
- What disruptions has this change presented to the Canadian [economy/society/etc.]?
- When you see news reports, what do the headlines say?
- How are Canadians responding to this change? Think about the consequences for different actors [the private sector, trade partners, scientists, governments, Canadian consumers, the non-governmental sector, investors]. How are these actors responding?
- Who has benefitted from the change? Who has been disadvantaged?

Go ahead and wander around in this world. If you see someone on the street, ask them a question to find out more.”

Before wrapping up, instruct participants to explore for another minute and then open their eyes when they are ready. Give participants a minute to record a few notes on what they saw.

Ask them to each share a single implication of the weak signal in 2030. Write these as a list of first-order consequences on the right side of the cascade diagram. Move on to second- and third-order consequences as participants delve into deeper implications.

2. Scenario development

In the [scenario development phase](#) (module 6), guided imaging is frequently used as part of an iterative process to develop scenarios. Horizons typically uses guided imaging after having developed the scenario logic and part of the structural scenario ([see module 6 slides and speaking points](#)). Partway through scenario development, whatever has been drafted so far can be used as the scaffolding for the guided imaging exercise; the content generated from guided imaging in turn can contribute to further advancing the scenario. Participants are able to experience the scenario more vividly through guided imaging, helping them further envision details about the scenario or the policy challenges and opportunities it might create.

Example 2: Guided imaging for scenario development

In Horizons' [Future of Asia](#) study, facilitators of the Digital Asia scenario led a scenario exercise using parts of the draft structural scenario table they had developed. They used the scenario table for the guided imaging script, reading lines and improvising as needed to form a basic overview story of the scenario. (In the case of this exercise, the draft structural scenario was quite large, so the facilitators focused on only parts of it. A piece is excerpted below as an example. It is important not to overwhelm participants with information, but to give them enough to spark their imaginations). After the guided imaging exercise, participants were prompted to share what they saw to develop more specific insight into what was occurring in the scenario. Some of this detail was then added to the structural scenario table.

Muddling Through Scenario (Archetype II): Digital Asia

Imagine it is the year 2030. You are on a trip to Asia. You are about to land in a city you have wanted to visit. You are feeling relaxed, clear and energized. As the plane door opens you feel the temperature change and you smell the unusual smells.

Here are some of the things that are happening... **[Read through the draft structural scenario table, selecting relevant parts of the scenario logic and change drivers, possibly touching on some system elements... SLOWLY]**

Now I want you to focus on a few special features... **[Read the system elements and slowly go through the facets, allowing many PAUSES. Ask any questions you have of participants, possibly about the facets or other themes in the scenario table you'd like to flesh out]**

Now take a minute to review what you have seen and develop a few short headlines to describe the most interesting or significant changes you saw.

When you are ready, open your eyes... **[discuss the visualization, one system element at a time]**

Archetype II (Muddling Through): Digital Asia

SCENARIO LOGIC

Power Shift	US still dominant but Asian influence growing
Economy	Slow growth in Asia
Structural Changes in Economy	Structural insecurity: increasing feeling of insecurity as job and income losses occur, but costs go down as well

CHANGE DRIVERS

Automation transforming jobs	High job losses: Businesses taking advantage of robotics, a decade is lost as labour force adapts to new economy
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Ownership unbundling	A battle between rights holders and pirates, and open source dominates. The sharing economy continues in familiar areas, and people increasingly see it as essential. Some successes, some failures, but on average, it works.
Cyber living and working	Robots are removing jobs faster than new jobs are appearing. East Asia and the West are hiring young virtual workers, especially from South and Southeast Asia.

System Elements	Facets
Character of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual telepresence work is widespread • Robots are being used extensively (robots in factories, robots among us (in homes and at workplaces), smarter devices (self-driving cars), AI) • Unemployment rate is persistently rising • Employment – there is less full-time work, more contract/project work, microwork
Economic Sector(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing: {by people, by robots with shipping, where you live by 3D printing} • Additive manufacturing: {not important, at the factory, at the print shop/neighbourhood, in the home}
Character of Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreements on Intellectual Property (IP): {weak, strong and enforceable, global, regional, strong on paper but unenforceable} • Regional free trade zones: {US-dominated, CN-led, Asia regional, bilaterals everywhere} • Things traded: {services, durables, raw materials, intangible goods} • Protectionism: {goods, virtual services, trade walls, none} • Reserve currencies: {US\$, CN Renminbi, currency baskets, all of the above (a bunch of things and Bitcoin)}

3. Results

When presenting the results of a foresight study, guided imaging can help a new audience understand and explore the associated policy implications. Horizons uses guided imaging as a tool to quickly engage an audience with new content and explore the implications for specific policy areas and for the Government of Canada as a whole.

Example 3: Guided imaging to present foresight report findings

Following the [Future of Asia study](#), Horizons engaged public servants with the content through a guided imaging exercise that summarized some key findings of the report (below). These were not intended to be predictions of the future, but rather a plausible future to explore.

Imagine that you are a public servant in 2030, observing the world and the new policy challenges and opportunities it has created for your department and the Government of Canada.

You see that Asia has now emerged as the new centre of gravity of the global economy. Asian countries invested heavily in digital infrastructure and built a strong digital economy. With the majority of the world's consumers and internet users, Asia is driving consumer demands, online habits and innovation.

New digital technologies have greatly altered economic opportunities. Industrial use of robotics and 3D printing has reshaped manufacturing industries. Asian businesses are using artificial intelligence and data analytics to greatly expand the digital service economy to serve the global markets where most people now find work.

Canadian service industries were disrupted by the rise of virtual workers using telepresence and telerobotics technologies. Service industries were further disrupted by the decomposition of jobs into tasks—some assigned to lower-cost labour and some to artificial intelligence. Frugal innovations in Asian products and services are driving down prices and stimulating new ways to work and to live. How do you see these changes affecting Canadians?

Demand for Canadian oil has fallen for the 10th year in a row as Asia electrifies its transportation systems. Asia is a leader in renewable energy and electric vehicles. Asia is also deeply concerned about vulnerability to climate-change related natural disasters. How are these changes affecting Canada?

The whole world is connected through mobile technologies. Furthermore, the dramatic rise of sensors, cameras and the internet of things means that most aspects of our lives are connected online. Privacy is an outdated concept. Cyber threats are a growing challenge. What consequences do you see?

Asian countries are asserting influence on the world order through regional trade agreements and Asian-led alternatives to the World Bank and NATO. Asia is increasingly vying to set the rules. What impact do you see in Canada?

Take a final minute to reflect. Try to summarize the surprises and challenges you've seen in 5-to-8-word headlines. We are especially interested in those that current policies and institutions are not ready for.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

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