Scenario Planning Workshop:
A Tool for Community and Organizational Resilience

RCP Network Gathering
Session A2 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Listening and Connecting Track
November 14, 2024

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WORKSHOP AGENDA

- An Introduction to Scenario Planning (15')

- Group Exercise (50')

- Application of this Tool (15')

- Q & A (10')

WHAT IS SCENARIO PLANNING?

- Scenario planning is a tool that allows groups to think and talk about the future in different ways
- Scenario planning helps separate the unknown (or uncertain) from the known (or certain)
- Scenario planning is a simple tool that can be scaled up to incorporate more complexity
- "Scenaric thinking" can be applied to many aspects of our professional and personal lives

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WHY USE THIS TOOL?

- Moves you away from thinking that the future will look like the past

- Helps everyone become aware of where you are now

- Helps everyone be alert to signals about the future

- Helps you test out some ideas before reality arrives

- Takes some guesswork out of decisions about actions to take

- Can be used to engage with, listen to, and communicate with the public – even about challenging topics

- Helps you plan for uncertainty

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCENARIOS

- **Explorative:** identifies different futures, gets people thinking outside the box, incorporates uncertainties

- **Normative:** starts with a well-defined target (e.g., "preserve open space for our community"; "dominate electric car industry") and then compares plausible ways to achieve it

- **Predictive:** uses combinations of certainties, like population and economic growth, to assess different futures

- We will use an **explorative** scenario planning methodology

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APPLYING SCENARIO PLANNING

- How can we RCPs coordinate across jurisdictions?

- What are plausible future shoreline conditions for Lake Champlain, and what does that mean for our town park there?

- How can my organization be ready for demographic or political changes in our community "in the new normal?"

- How can my siblings and I prepare for different possible futures with our aging parents?

Scenario Planning 101
1. WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN?
2. WHAT WOULD WE DO?

New culverts designed to prevent flooding in Essex Co.

By KIM SMITH DEDAM Press-Republican   Sep 20, 2015

Roaring Brook before and after: A 35-foot wide cement culvert (bottom) replaced a pair of pipes beneath River Road in Wilmington. Culverts were also installed where the road crosses Holcomb Brook and on Lenny Preston Road for an unnamed brook.
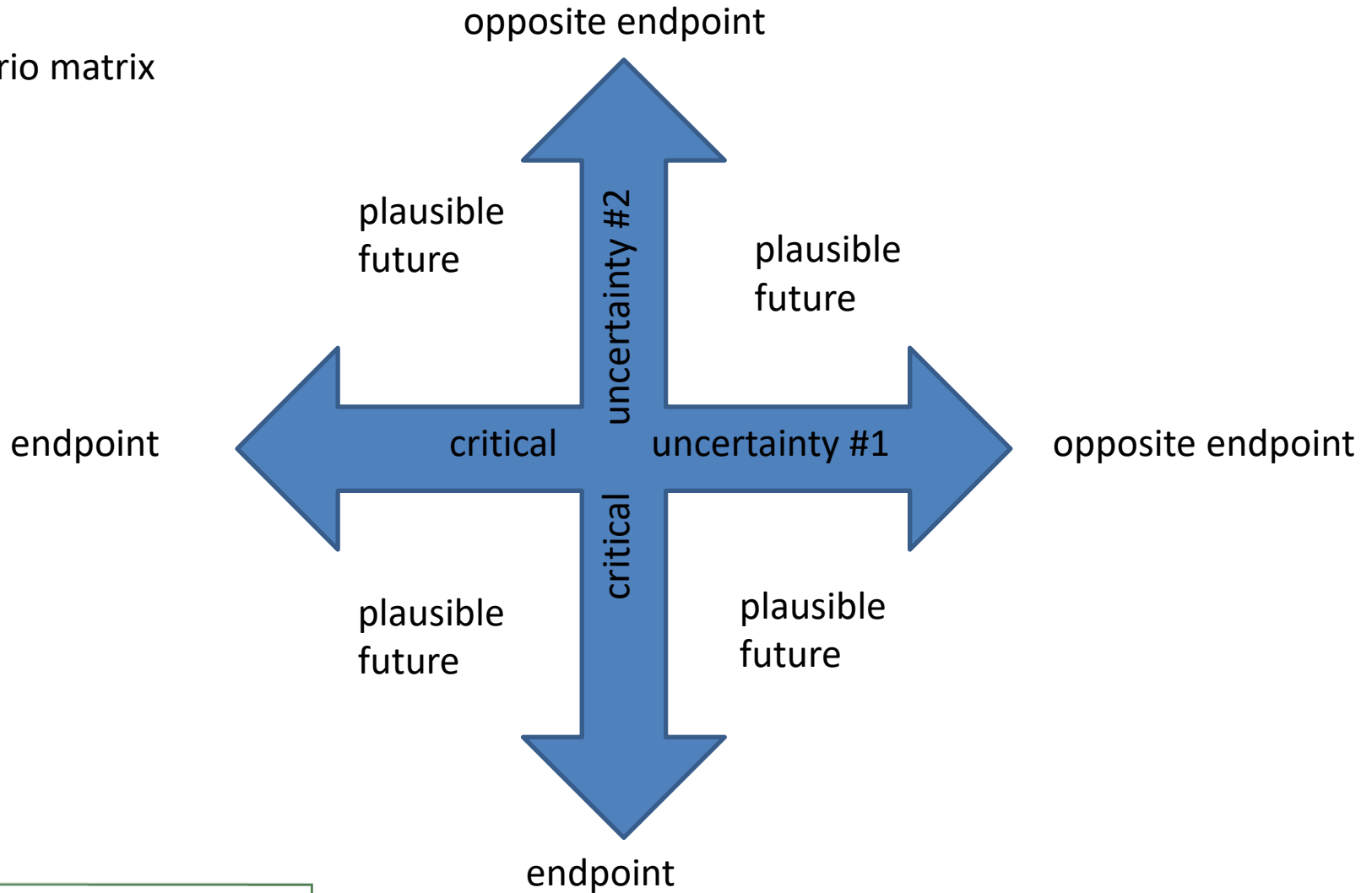THE NATURE CONSERVANCY PHOTOS

NORTH ELBA — Three new culverts in the Ausable River watershed were strategically engineered to prevent flood damage.

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THE BASIC APPROACH

1. Focus: What are the main stressors affecting whether your organization can achieve its mission in the future?

2. Brainstorm stressors, narrow down to critical uncertainties

3. Explore what different futures might look like

4. Explore what actions you would take in each future

5. Sort through the outcomes

6. Integrate outcomes into organization, plans, media, etc.

7. Review and communicate your scenarios regularly

A SCENARIO MATRIX

scenario matrix

opposite endpoint

plausible future

plausible future

endpoint

critical uncertainty #1

opposite endpoint

uncertainty #2

critical

plausible future

plausible future

endpoint

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CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

- Identify critical uncertainties, stressors and key drivers of change: temperature, federal and state grants, elected officials, community support, demographic changes, etc.

- Which are known (certain) vs unknown (uncertain)?

- Separate out known, certain drivers (they will be incorporated during discussion)

- Narrow it down to two critical uncertainties (yeah… two!)

SIFTING THROUGH THE STRESSORS

Social, Political, Economic	
Regulatory flexibility (low/high)	
Org. leadership (low/high)	
Community support (low/high)	
Partner engagement (low/high)	
Staffing (weak/strong)	
Gov't funding (stable/variable)	
Gov't funding (low/high)	
Population growth (down/up)	
New state climate regulations	

Environmental	
Annual precipitation (low/high)	
Storm surge (low/high)	
Fire season (bad/okay)	
Precip form (rain/snow)	
Sea level rise (fast/slow)	
Growing season (stable/variable)	
Summer heat index (normal/high)	
Mean annual temps (low/high)	
Invasive plants along river	

✓ = known, certain   ? = unknown, uncertain

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WHAT IT REALLY LOOKS LIKE
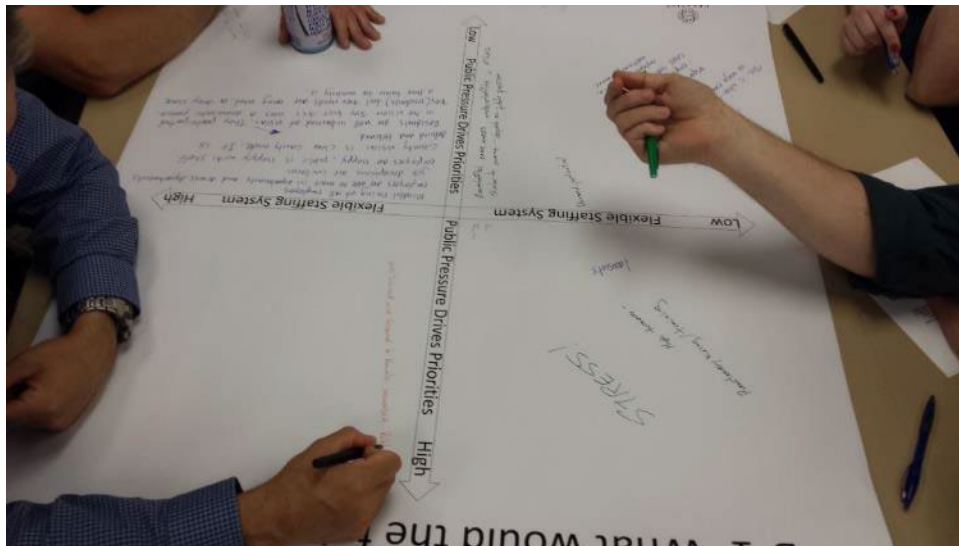
B-2   What would the future look like?

Key:
+ positive/reward
- negative/risk

(High Public Pressure Drives Priorities)

- Long-term programs can be disrupted
- Hardest, most uncomfortable quadrat for staff, set up for one thing, thrown into something else,
- Best thin that one can do is cope/manage as best as you can (stressful)
- Expectations altered
- Not resilient
- Not effective in responding to public pressures/needs, so resources not deployed/assigned to do so
- Worst perception of gov'ts ability to respond to residents and work on their behalf
- Public perception: gov't is ineffective / useless
- Public perception: innovate, respond to community and residents (applies to all quadrats)

High Public Pressure Drives Priorities
- Transferable skill sets: know what skills staff has and how they can be best utilized throughout the organization
- "robust yet able to fail safely"
- + opportunity to fail, + growth mindset
- - letters to the editor decide the future
- + possibility to emphasize the positive and solicit what is working "resourceful and connected"
- + could include social justice framework
- + potential for high inclusivity if we can create systems/processes to address public "pressure"
- + distributed leadership need to address and streamline equitable access
- - short term orientation
- - short term/squeaky wheel and vocal minority tends to drive policy, etc.
- - resource consumption / draining
- - burn out possible / addressing the "squirrels" and the "fires" leads to frantic decisions and we don't see the forest through the trees
- - staff feels less control over work b/c all response/focus on external
- + allows flexible staffing systems within internal social capital / capacity building
- + public feels empowered and engaged when they are heard / validated
- - may nurture excessive input from external
- + comforting and hopeful for staff / internal and good for morale and serves staff who may have less flexibility
- + intentionally setting up systems for communication so this is not reactive and is more responsive
- Ability to respond to constituents (residents) without other long-standing priorities disrupted – can do both
- Public pressure can be defined /driven ideologically or pragmatically (ex. Natural disaster, economic recession + pragmatics" ex: ideologically meaning constituents are vocal, engaged – how are we engaging them?
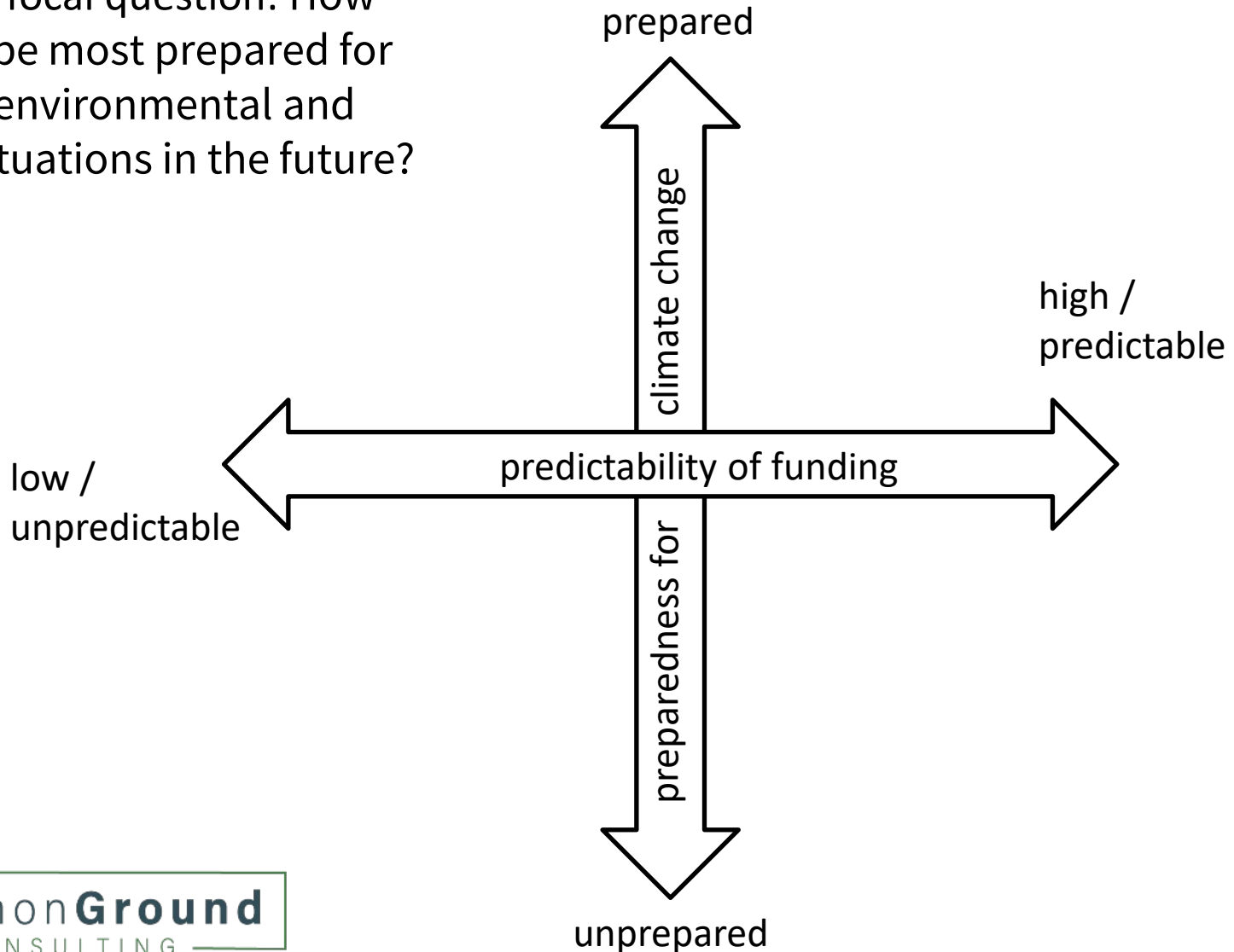- What defines "High" quantity?

Low   Flexible Staffing System | Flexible Staffing System   High

Low Public Pressure Drives Priorities
- Public perception: bureaucracy
- Long-term programs (e.g. capital) those that need multiple years to implement are the focus, staff resources are consistently available for staff working on them are not disrupted by needs that "come up"
- Stagnant
- Missing opportunities
- Status quo is the goal
- + highly specialized work
- Highly focused and siloed in achieving strategic plan
- +/- some staff are very comfortable here
- - some staff are bored / disengaged
- - classic stereotype of gov't "good enough for gov't"
- - little innovation
- - reduce potential for inclusion
- Bureaucracy
- Typically good economy and no disasters

Low Public Pressure Drives Priorities (right)
- Transferable skill sets: know what skills staff has and how they can be best utilized throughout the organization
- Public perception: gov't is here working for me
- Opportunities to learn new skill sets
- Strategic professional development / mentor
- Implementing a clear strategic plan that is well-articulated and prioritized, well-researched and grounded in public opinion
- Love letters to and from the editor
- Staff resources can be repurposed and reallocated to meet needs
- Growth mindset
- Risk: - if strategic plan is not aligned, we are seen as tone-deaf and self-serving
- Low public pressure can be a result of positive external context, like a good economy or freedom from disaster
- This works best when there is alignment between the public and our plans/direction
- Typically good economy and no disasters

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Workshop focal question: How can RCPs be most prepared for changing environmental and funding situations in the future?

prepared

climate change

high / predictable

low / unpredictable

predictability of funding

preparedness for

unprepared

WHAT WOULD THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

- Consider what the future would be like – what does it look like, function like, how is funded, who's on your team, who's not?

- Think big but also consider details.

- Consider different points of view.

- Consider the downsides of each plausible future.

- Give each future a memorable name.

- Write a headline you might read in each future.

Some ways of describing the future(s):
- What are staff thinking about?
- What is leadership worrying about?
- What is your board of directors doing?
- What's going on in the natural world?
- What's in the newspaper? Social media?
- What's going on in state capital? In D.C.?
- What's going on with your funding?
- Who is showing up at your local events?
- What signals and trends are you seeing about your uncertainties?

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WHAT ACTIONS WOULD YOU TAKE?

- Consider what actions you would take in each of the four plausible futures.

- Think big but also consider details.

- Consider different points of view.

- Write a headline you might read in each future.

Some ways of describing actions:
- What projects are staff working on?
- What is leadership doing / changing?
- What are you sharing on social media?
- What do you need to tell or ask elected officials?
- What kinds of grants or donors do you need?
- What kind of community outreach are you doing?
- What staff do you need to hire or let go?
- What kind of people / skills do you need on your board?

Riverkeeper calls on governor to sign legislation to expand testing for contaminants in drinking water

📅 July 29, 2021   🕐 6:18 am

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MAKING SENSE OF THE OUTCOMES

- Are they plausible? Gut-check!

- Identify No-Brainers that show up in multiple scenarios

- Identify No-Gainers that don't advance your organization or buy you anything

- Identify Hedge your Bets actions that don't show up much, but might be worth doing

- Check actions against your strategic plan

- Overlay and integrate known / certain stressors (remember them?)

- When new ideas arise, test them against the plausible futures

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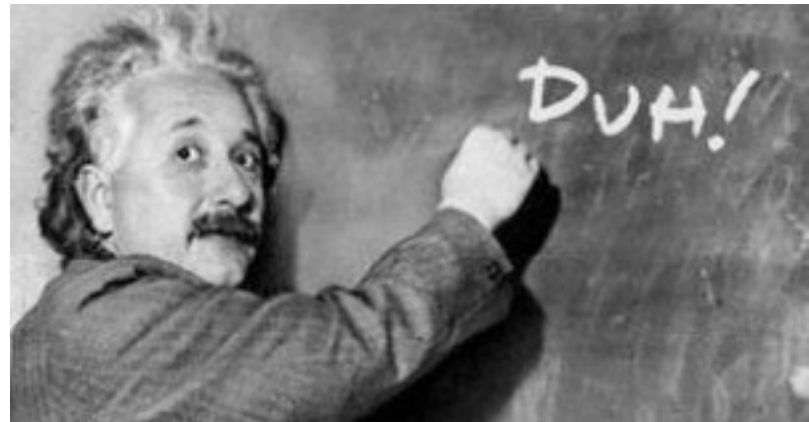
COMMUNICATING THE OUTCOMES

- Telling stories about possible futures

- Noticing what's going on around you

- Visual, verbal, auditory, and other sensory ways of describing the future

- Convincing your leadership / elected officials their pet project doesn't help!

- Explaining to the public why you are doing a project or taking a certain action
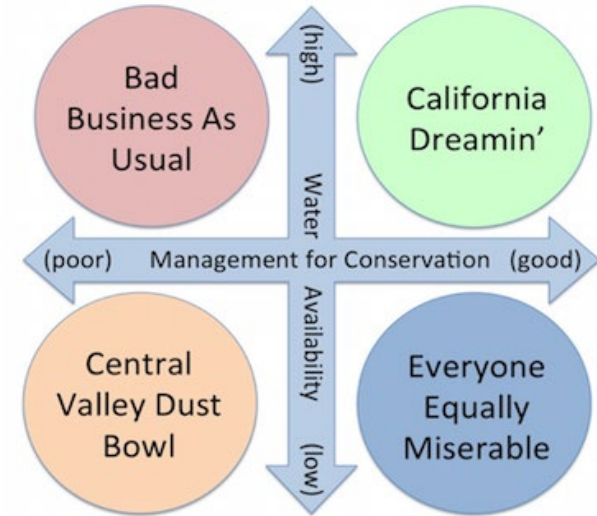
Source: California Climate Commons, Landscape Conservation Cooperative
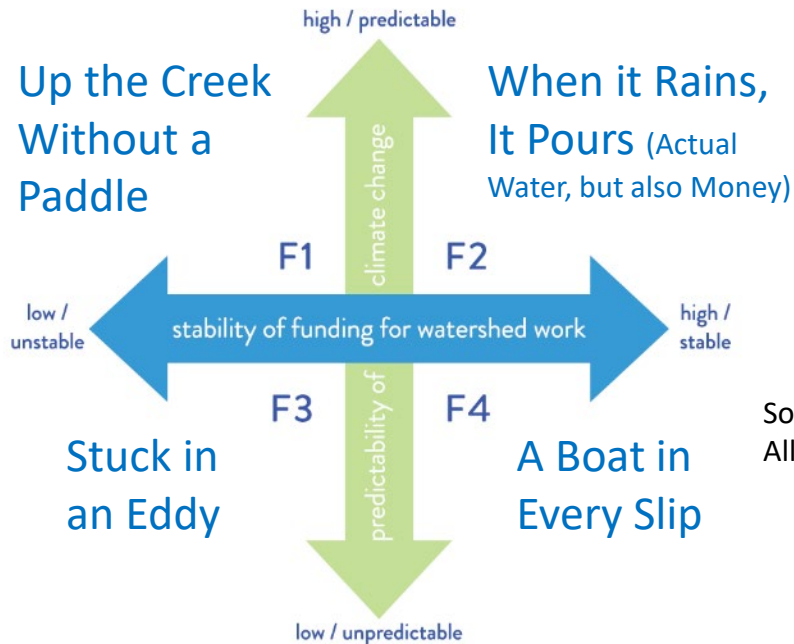
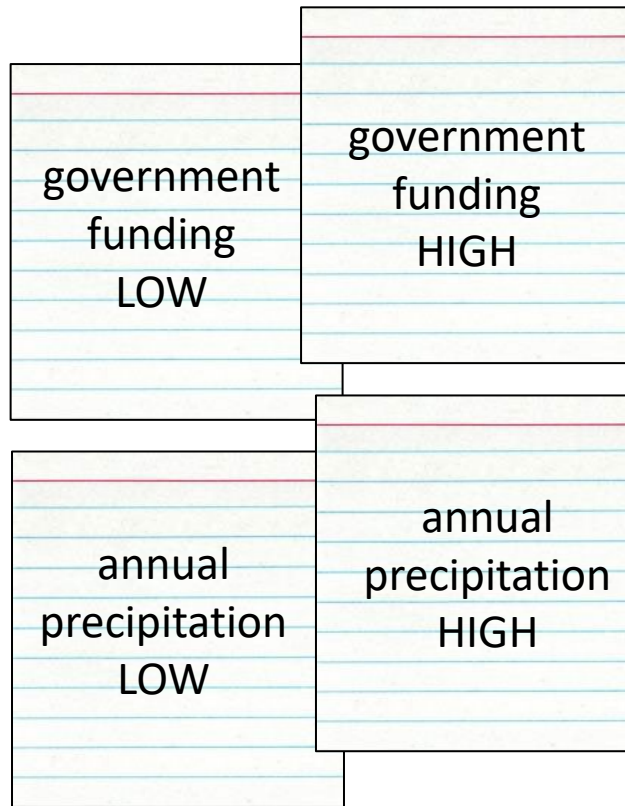Source: Hudson River Watershed Alliance Strategic Plan

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COMMUNITY SCENARIO PLANNING

FLIPCARD SCENARIOS

Write ends of critical uncertainties on each side of a card

Only do two at a time

Prompt discussion about what future(s) look like and what actions to take

government funding LOW

government funding HIGH

annual precipitation LOW

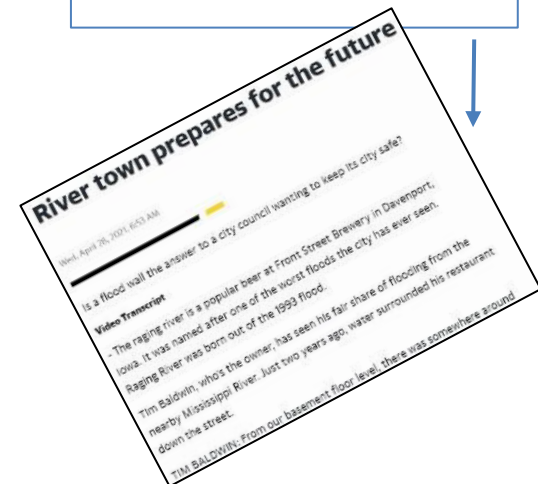annual precipitation HIGH

HEADLINES

Option 1 – have the group create fake headlines / media

Option 2 – have the group find current media that supports the plausibility of different futures

PRE-FILLED AXES
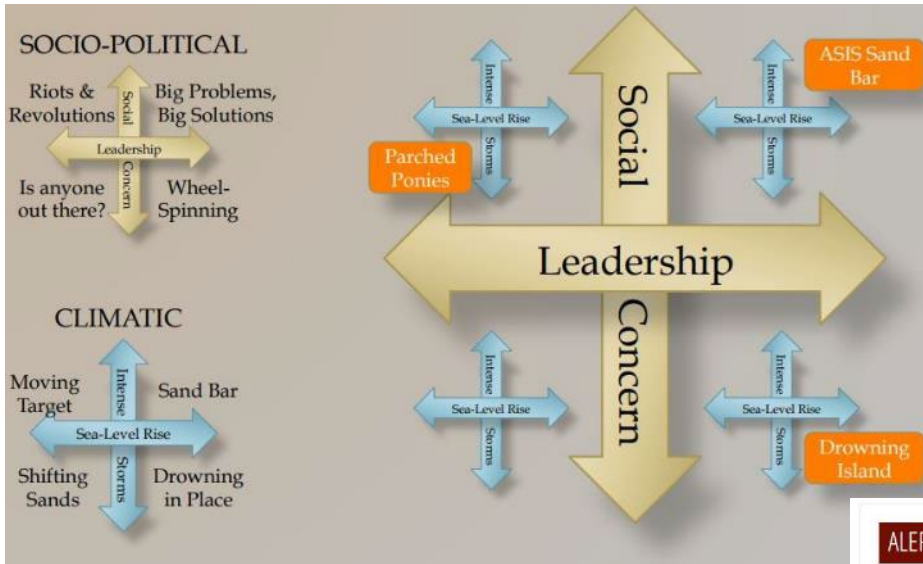
What we did today! Keep it simple

River town prepares for the future

Wed, April 28, 2021, 6:53 AM

Is a flood wall the answer to a city council wanting to keep its city safe?

Video Transcript

- . The raging river is a popular beer at Front Street Brewery in Davenport, Iowa. It was named after one of the worst floods the city has ever seen.

Raging River was born out of the 1993 flood.

Tim Baldwin, who's the owner, has seen his fair share of flooding from the nearby Mississippi River. Just two years ago, water surrounded his restaurant down the street.

TIM BALDWIN: From our basement floor level, there was somewhere around

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DIVING DEEPER INTO SCENARIOS

NESTED SCENARIOS

Adds complexity
4x4 within 4x4

Source: NPS Climate Change Response Program,
for Assateague Island National Seashore (ASIS)

EMERGENCIES

Towards end of
workshop, share
an emergency
and discuss how
ideas hold up

Flash Flood EMERGENCY

ISSUED FOR...
Exceedingly rare situations when
a severe threat to human life and
catastrophic damag[e]
flood is happening o[n]

The San Diego
Union-Tribune.

300,000 FLEE FIRES

Blazes march toward coast; hundreds of homes destroyed in county

ALERTS IN EFFECT

PARK CLOSURES

⊖ Temporary Closure Of The Fairy Falls Day Use Area
As a public health precaution, the National Park Service has temporarily closed the Fairy Falls Day Use Area, near Stillwater,
Minnesota for the safety of staff and visitors.

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RESOURCES

What If? The Art of Scenario Thinking for Nonprofits.
https://community-wealth.org/content/what-if-art-scenario-thinking-nonprofits

Scenario Planning for Urban Planners: Toward a Practitioner's Guide.
https://www.planning.org/knowledgebase/resource/9146900/

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
https://www.lincolninst.edu/

Scenario Planning with Tom Chermak, CSU.
https://youtu.be/UpBBJtBZ-lE

Using Scenarios to Explore Climate Change: A Handbook for Practitioners.
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/climate/CCScenariosHandbookJuly2013.pdf

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