Future Workshop

A Future Workshop is a participatory method in which participants collaboratively analyse problems, develop visions for the future, and translate them into concrete actions. The method combines creative thinking with practical planning and is particularly suitable for topics that require innovative ideas and long-term perspectives.
A Future Workshop consists of three consecutive phases: the Critique Phase, the Vision Phase, and the Implementation Phase.
This structured process encourages participants to move deliberately from identifying problems to imagining desirable futures and finally to developing realistic actions. The method often leads to creative, collaboratively developed solutions.

Participation Depth	Participate, Have a say
Project Phase	Concept Development
Goals	Developing Ideas
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Activating, Creative

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Future Workshop is to develop new perspectives and concrete ideas for the future together. The method helps identify problems, encourages creative thinking, and transforms visions into realistic actions that can support future planning and development.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the topic and guiding question
Begin by considering:

- Which future-oriented topic should be explored?
- What is the central question?

The guiding question should be:

- open-ended
- easy to understand
- future-oriented

Examples include:

- "How should our neighbourhood develop in the future?"
- "How can sustainable mobility be promoted?"
- "How do we want to live together in the future?"

2. Prepare the venue
Arrange:

- sufficient space for group work
- pinboards or work surfaces
- flexible seating arrangements

Important:

The environment should encourage creativity and open discussion.

3. Organise the facilitation
The facilitation team:

- explains the method
- supports the working groups
- manages the schedule and structure
- encourages creative thinking

Most importantly:

Ideas should not be evaluated or criticised during the creative phases.

4. Invite participants
Aim for a diverse group with:

- different perspectives

- different age groups
- varied experiences

Diverse groups often generate more creative and innovative outcomes.

Execution

1. Introduction

At the beginning, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the workshop
- the overall process
- the three workshop phases
- the discussion guidelines
- the schedule

The guiding question is then introduced.

A short round of introductions and an informal icebreaker can help create trust and openness.

2. Critique Phase – Identifying problems

During the first phase, participants identify:

- existing problems
- shortcomings
- challenges
- negative experiences

Ideas are typically collected through:

- brainstorming
- moderation cards
- small-group discussions

Important:

This phase intentionally encourages participants to express criticism openly.

Helpful questions include:

- "What is currently not working well?"
- "Which problems do you experience?"
- "What concerns you the most?"

3. Organise and prioritise the topics
The collected ideas are:

- clustered
- organised
- discussed

Participants then identify the most important issues, often using dot voting.

This creates a shared focus for the following phases.

4. Vision Phase – Developing future visions
Participants now deliberately shift their perspective.

Instead of focusing on problems, they imagine desirable future scenarios.

Helpful questions include:

- "What would the ideal situation look like?"
- "What do we hope for in the future?"
- "What could this place become if anything were possible?"

Important:

Creative, ambitious, and unconventional ideas are explicitly encouraged during this phase.

5. Collect and visualise ideas
Participants capture their visions by:

- writing ideas on cards
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creating drawings

- making sketches
- displaying ideas throughout the room

This often results in:

- future scenarios
- visionary concepts
- creative solution ideas

Facilitators should encourage participants to think boldly and imaginatively.

6. Implementation Phase – Prioritising ideas
Participants now consider:

- Which ideas are most important?
- Which ideas appear realistic?
- Which proposals have broad support?

Ideas are prioritised once again, often using dot voting.

7. Develop concrete action plans
Working in small groups, participants transform their visions into practical actions.

A helpful framework is the W-method, asking:

- What should be achieved?
- Why is it important?
- How can it be implemented?
- With whom?
- By when?
- Which obstacles might arise?

The results may be presented as:

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sketches

- action lists
- implementation plans

8. Present the results
Finally, each group presents its work to the plenary.

Presentations include:

- ideas
- priorities
- proposed actions

The group then reflects on and discusses the overall outcomes together.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Document:

- future visions
- proposed actions
- priorities
- sketches
- discussion outcomes

The documentation should be visual, clear, and easy to understand.

2. Develop an action plan
The workshop results can be consolidated into an action plan containing:

- concrete measures
- responsibilities
- timelines
- next steps

3. Share the results
The documentation should be shared with:

- participants
- the public administration
- policymakers
- other stakeholders

Important:

Communicate transparently how the outcomes will be incorporated into future planning and decision-making.

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- addressing open questions about the future
- developing creative ideas
- creating shared visions
- actively involving people in change processes
- working on complex social or spatial issues
- developing long-term perspectives

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- only short-term solutions are needed
- dealing with highly escalated conflicts
- there is no real scope for change

TIPS

- Schedule sufficient breaks—creative processes require time.
- The Vision Phase works best when ideas are not evaluated too early.
- A welcoming and open atmosphere encourages creativity.
- Visualisation helps make ideas tangible and easier to discuss.
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Facilitators should actively support creative thinking throughout the workshop.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- highly technical planning tasks
- topics with no real scope for action
- rapid decision-making processes
- highly hierarchical groups without an open discussion culture

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/zukunftwerkkstatt