THE FUTURE TIMELINE DESIGN

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY: EASY TO MODERATE

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

This meeting design enables small (10 people) and large (100+ people) groups to engage in "Horizon Thinking" to anticipate the future events, trends and issues that could potentially impact or influence the institution over the next 5-10 years. It is a highly interactive, interesting and informative design that makes everyone smarter about their institution's future.

The primary goal of this design is to create a powerful database for strategic planning. It will help create snapshots of the future that can give leaders and stakeholders information on possible future scenarios.

One of the disciplines of strategic planning is to consistently look outward toward the external world. The more stakeholders understand the external realities, the more proactive they can be. Collaborative planning assumes that stakeholders throughout the institution, not just senior leadership, should engage in *Horizon Thinking* on a regular basis.

LOGISTICS

Materials: Post-its™, flipchart paper, magic markers and masking tape
**Space needs:** Large, comfortable room with usable (50 feet per timeline) of wall space
Time frame: 1-1 ¼ hours

HOW TO SET UP THE DESIGN

(We will use 48 participants as a model for this design)
The facilitator would have 10 sheets of flipchart paper taped to a wall in the room. The facilitator should make sure that each participant is given ten post-its™.

10 Post-its™
per participant
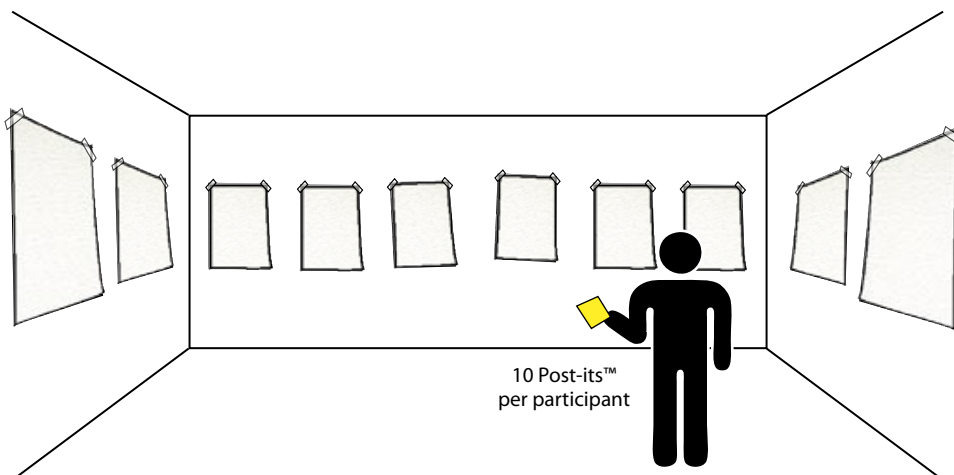
FACILITATOR'S DIRECTIONS TO THE PTF

"Please think about the future events, issues and trends that could impact or influence *(either positively or negatively)* the way Incredible University provides its services, conducts its business or how it operates over the next 10 years." It is helpful to provide some definitions either on a flipchart or a hand-out. For example:

> **An event** is a single occurrence (e.g. passage of a piece of legislation, retirement of a president or chancellor, election of a new mayor or governor
>
> **An issue** is an important theme that has substantial power and influence to impact an institution (e.g. faculty compensation, student access, equity, use of adjunct faculty, technology in the classroom)
>
> **A trend** is an ongoing set of circumstances that has consistency and momentum (e.g. student demographics, aging faculty, increased competition from non-profits, slowing down of the regional economy

The facilitator should briefly walk participants through the definitions and check for understanding. Then the facilitator should communicate the following:

- Please put down **one** event, trend or issues per post-it™
- Please indicate if a trend or issue will last for awhile
- Legibility is important! Because we will review the post-its™ in a few minutes
- When you are ready, please go to the Future Timeline and "populate" it. Put your events, trends and issues in the year you believe they will occur
- If you come to the Timeline and see a post-it™ that is similar to yours, please check √ off the post-it™ to indicate agreement and tear yours up. This way we avoid redundant post-its™ clogging up the Timeline. Make sure you check off the appropriate post-it™ so we capture your data.

Give participants about 15 minutes to think, write on their post-its™ and populate the Timeline. At this time, you will have a tremendous amount of information that needs to be distilled and understood by everyone.

At this stage of the design, the facilitator would ask participants to create small, mixed groups of four people. You can have participants self-organize or use a counting-off method of one to twelve which will give you 12 groups of 4 participants each. (You have 48 participants)

The facilitator should give the following instructions:
Please work with your group of four and review the post-its™ on the Timeline. Your goal in the next 20 minutes is to search through all the information and "generally agree" on the three most important issues, events or trends (not 3 or each, three total) that Incredible University must manage effectively if it is to *thrive* in the future.

After the small groups have reviewed the Timeline and agreed on their top 3 issues, events and trends, the facilitator needs to create a master list on flipchart paper in full view of everyone. Once again, take one idea from each group using the Round Robin approach until all the ideas are captured. Check off similar ideas to begin to prioritize the list. Your list might look like this:

1. There will be a dramatic decrease in available students throughout the region √√√√
2. Technology costs will only increase due to the strong demand by students for cutting edge technology √√√
3. Our depending on state funding is erratic √√
4. Student housing needs great improvement √√√
5. Teaching in the classroom will be even more technology-based √√√√ √
6. Competition from non-profits (University of Phoenix, Laureate, Apollo) will greatly increase √√√√
7. Competition for top academic students will increase dramatically √√
8. Many of our current faculty will retire over the next decade √√√√ √√
9. Deferred maintenance will get very expensive √√√
10. President Seitz is planning to retire in two years √√√√ √√

Even though you have 48 participants in this design, your master list will be around 10-15 prioritized themes. If you have a large group (e.g. 100 people) to work with, use two Future Timelines and two facilitators.

SCHEDULE

Facilitator welcomes participants and explains the
purpose and directions for the design...10 minutes

Participants think about the events, trends and issues
that could impact the institution; write them on
post-its™ and populate the Timeline .... 15 minutes

Participants self-organize or the facilitator uses a
counting-off method and puts people into working
groups of 4 participants...5 minutes

Small groups review the Timeline and generally agree
on top 3 issues/events/trends...20 minutes

Facilitator creates prioritized master list using a Round
Robin approach ....15 minutes

TOTAL TIME: **APPROXIMATELY 1-1 ¼ HOURS**