# Appendix C. Activity: Scenario Thinking at Your Library[[1]](#endnote-1)

### Overview

This activity is intended for people with a wide range of roles within the library, as a diversity of opinion and experience is useful for futures thinking and scenario work. The purpose is to engage library colleagues in stretching your imaginations to consider possible futures and make better decisions now that can meet a variety of possible futures. This can build your capacity to engage in strategic thinking and planning.

One person should assume the role of facilitator and assume duties such as:

* schedule the room,
* send a meeting invitation and convey instructions to participants,
* check in with participants one week before to ensure they are shifting from reading to research and writing,
* ensure materials are available for the meeting (flip charts, white board, post it notes, snacks),
* convene the meeting,
* issue time keeping reminders,
* scribe during the event,
* guide the debrief, and
* help the group determine next steps.

### Pre work for participants

*Two weeks before.* Read the ACRL report “Futures thinking for academic librarians: Higher education in 2025.” Choose two scenarios to research from the high-impact, high-probability quadrant (30 minutes).

*One week before.* Search for evidence from the present that relates to the themes in the scenarios you chose. This could be in the higher education trade press, technology blogs, national newspapers, etc. (60 minutes).

*Two days before.* Engage in a free form writing exercise to flesh out each scenario as a more robust story 5-15 years in the future. Combine the evidence you found with your imagination to draw inferences for how the future could look in higher education. You should write in the present tense, as if you were there living in that moment, and give your scenario a brief title (30 minutes).

### Meeting instructions

Total time: 2 hours

*Meeting convenes.* Facilitator explains purpose of the meeting, provides overview of meeting structure, and introduces small group exercise, emphasizing that members should actively listen and reserve judging comments, whether good or bad (10 minutes).

*Small group.* Participants break into groups of three to take turns discussing the scenarios they wrote and potential implications they could imagine may be possible for the library (2 scenarios x 10 minutes x 3 people = 60 minutes).

1. The first member of the triad shares with her two colleagues a scenario vignette she chose from the ACRL report and summarizes the related evidence she gathered. Those listening should restrain themselves from discussing, but may take notes of anything that piques their interest and any connections/thoughts that form while listening.
2. The first member next shares the full, rich scenario she invented. Those listening should not critique and may not make evaluative comments of any type (even supportive ones). Only two questions are allowed: “Why does this happen?” and “What happens next?” These questions speak to the characteristic of internal consistency. If the presenter can’t answer, the group should move on.[[2]](#endnote-2)
3. Finally, after each scenario is presented, the triad discusses together possible implications for the library, with one member of the triad recording these. Again, the goal is to aim for wide, divergent thinking so restrain judgment.
4. The round continues with member 2 and member 3 until all six scenarios have been shared.

The facilitator should float throughout the room during the small group exercise, clarifying instructions if needed. She should support the group with time keeping, giving a heads up a few minutes before each 20 minute segment is about to end. Remind triads that shortly they will need to move on to the next member or to the report out and debrief phase.

*Report out and debrief.* At the end of the complete round, each triad reports out to the large group on possible implications they envisioned for the library, reflects on decisions the library would need to make now, and considers others on campus who would be affected. The facilitator will guide this large group discussion and help to synthesize where appropriate (35 minutes).

During this time, the goal is for the large group to hear each other’s thinking and, together, to consider what decisions the library would have to make now to prepare for that type of a future, were it to occur. There is likely to be overlap on topics and scenarios chosen, so the conversation may become less round robin and more organic.

To help guide the discussion, the facilitator may wish to ask prompting questions such as: Is this a preferred future we want to work towards or are there risks here we ought to work to mitigate? What action could we take now to do so? Who else on campus would be affected? What is our relationship like with that group now? In what ways could that relationship be strengthened? (For other potential questions to prompt discussion or encourage participants to probe more deeply, see those suggested in the report’s **Analysis of Findings and Discussion).**

*Next Steps.* Together the group should consider possible next steps. Is your library engaged in strategic planning? Can this help feed into that process? Is your campus making strategic decisions now? How is the library represented? (15 minutes).

1. Appendix C is available as an editable document so that you may customize this activity for use in your library. For example, you may wish to create a half-day workshop and integrate some of the prework into the meting itself. You may also wish to create a worksheet for participants to use during the meeting. Visit the ACRL Web site <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/value/futures.cfm>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Van der Heijden (1996, p. 199 and 222) reported that Adam Kahane used these techniques of restraining evaluation and asking only two simple questions when working in a charged environment with a diverse group of South African political leaders post apartheid. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)