



TOOL | FUTURE SEARCH

The Future Search approach centers on a 2-3 day conference with ‘visioning’ at its core. The conference explores the past, present and future of a community with the aim of producing a strategic plan.

A key element of this approach is to establish some common ground on which participants can build and then develop a plan. The emphasis is on self-managed discussion and taking personal responsibility for implementation of actions.

The ideal number of participants is 64, allowing for eight groups of eight people in each discussion group. The event must be planned well in advance so that facilitators do not have an active role to play during the conference. The crucial stages in the process are:

Phase One	examine the past (personal, community and global issues);
Phase Two	explore current events, trends and developments;
Phase Three	look at present ‘proud’ and ‘sorry’ events in the community
Phase Four	discuss an ideal future or vision
Phase Five	identify some common ground; and
Phase Six	action planning.

STRENGTHS

- Meetings can accommodate large numbers of diverse people
- Participants take ownership of the process
- Power issues are reduced
- A lot can be achieved at one meeting that would otherwise take several meetings between different interest groups
- Traditionally under-represented minority groupings can be specifically targeted

WEAKNESSES

- Sometimes the conference can be seen as an end in itself rather than the beginning of a process
- Conferences can be expensive to hold and require considerable organising
- Requires time and commitment from both participants and coordinators

LEVEL OF APPROPRIATENESS

The Future Search approach assumes that participants have a high level of knowledge and skills in engagement and interaction.

USEFUL LINKS

- Future Search www.futuresearch.net
- Future Search in Derry and Strabane - Strategy Board Your City Your Say www.yourcityyoursay.com