

## Back to the Future

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Some ideas are worth repeating – like this technique that Tamarack has used many times for guiding a diverse group of people through the development of an action-oriented, go forward plan. Called *Future Search*, the technique derives from well-researched theories on the conditions under which diverse groups will cooperate.



Based on a process developed in the UK in the 1960s and used extensively in the 1970s in the US, as many as 300 people at a time were convened and in a day or two people would commit to many new projects considered unthinkable a few days before.

Future search is a planning meeting that helps people transform their capability for action very quickly. Future search brings people from all walks of life into the same conversation - those with resources, expertise, formal authority and need. They meet for two to three days telling stories about their past, present and desired future. Through dialogue they discover their common ground and an action plan for the future.

The technique brings together anywhere from 30 to 80 people at one time (or hundreds in parallel rooms). The meeting is task-focused and the agenda allows for both reflection and structured action. Key principles for success include:

- Get the "whole system" in the room. Invite a significant cross-section of all parties with a stake in the outcome.
- Explore the "whole elephant" before seeking to fix any part. Get everyone talking about the same world. Think globally, act locally.
- Put common ground and future focus front and center while treating problems and conflicts as information, not action items.
- Encourage self-management and responsibility for action by participants before, during, and after the future search.

The process is relatively simple. For a quick description of the technique, click [here](#).

### Related Links:

- [Searching for Responses to Poverty: A Future Search case study](#)
- [See how this process has produced "ripple effects", generating cooperative action that continues for months or years, taking on new forms and projects](#)
- [Additional resources and tools](#)

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