Effective Engagement: building relationships
with community and other stakeholders

Book 3
the engagement
toolkit

Victoria
The Place To Be

3.1 Backcasting

Description:

Backcasting is a method of analysing alternative futures, often energy futures. Its major distinguishing characteristic is a concern with how desirable futures can be attained. It involves working backward from a desired future end-point or set of goals to the present to determine the physical feasibility of that particular future and the policy measures required to reach that end point. End-points are usually chosen for a time 25 to 50 years in the future.[3]

Backcasting is similar to visioning, however backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will be, but rather to weigh up a number of possible futures, and decide the implications and preferable options, then to map out steps along the way.

Objectives:

Backcasting allows a group of people to weigh up the implications of different future options or policy goals.

Outcomes:

Backcasting provides one preferred option from a number of future possibilities, and a series of ways that the desired endpoint can be achieved.

Uses/strengths:

- Backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will likely be, but to indicate the relative feasibility and implications of different policy goals.
- Suggests the implications of likely futures, chosen not on the basis of their likelihood but on the basis of other criteria defined externally to the analysis (e.g. criteria of social or environmental desirability).
- Determines the freedom of action, in a policy sense, with respect to possible futures.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- No estimate of likelihood is possible.
- Does not seek to discover the underlying structural features of the world that would cause the future to come about.

Resources required:

- Publicity
- Venue rental
- Catering
- Staffing
- Moderator/facilitator
- Experts
- Recorders
- Gophers
- Artists/photographer
- Audiovisual recording equipment and amplification
- Overhead projectors
- Data projectors
- Video
- Slide projector/screen
- Printed public information sheets
- Response sheets
- Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.)
- Furniture
- Children's requirements

Can be used for:

- Showcase product, plan, policy
- Engage community
- Develop community capacity
- Develop action plan

Number of people required to help organise:

- Medium (2-12 people)
- Individual

Audience size:

- Large (> 30)
- Medium (11–30)

Time required:

- Medium (6 weeks – 6 months)

Skill level/support required:

- High (Specialist skills)
- Medium (Computer & other expertise)

Cost:

- High (> AUD$10,000)
- Medium (AUD$1,000 – AUD$10,000)

Participation level:

- High (Stakeholders participate in decision)

Innovation level:

- High (Innovative)

Method:

1. Define future goals and objectives, projecting 25-50 years into the future.
2. Specify the scenario by analysing the technological and physical characteristics of a path that would lead towards the specified goals.
3. Evaluate the scenario in terms of physical, technological and socio-economic feasibility and policy implications.
4. Brainstorm ways this desired end-point can be achieved, working backwards to the present.

References:

- Paehlke, R (1995) *Conservation and environmentalism: an encyclopedia*, Garland, New York

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[3] Paehlke, R (1995) *Conservation and environmentalism, an encyclopedia*, New York, Garland.