

CONVENER'S GUIDE

These scenarios are not predications of the future, rather they are stories of different ways the northern Great Plains region (ND, SD, NE, IA, MN) could look in 2050.

These scenarios have been produced as a part of the Meadowlark Project, in order to raise public awareness of how today's decisions affect not only tomorrow but our long term future and to get the public engaged in a discussion about the future they want to help create.

The idea behind these four scenarios is that with a world in constant flux it's impossible to predict or forecast the actual future, thus each scenario provides a plausible "what if" story about what our region might look like in 2050. The scenarios can help remind us that we have the power to create our future instead of reacting to what happens to us.

These materials provide suggestions and guidelines on:

- how to use these scenarios
- how to facilitate a dialogue
- how to handle challenging issues if they arise

Why civic dialogues?

The civic dialogue process will allow anyone to become engaged in an open discussion about what the future of this region could look like. By bringing together a diverse group of people with different opinions, backgrounds and beliefs the opportunity will emerge for a full and rich discussion on the issues, challenges and opportunities that face our region.

Through having these open dialogues, people can learn from one another and connections can be built between issues and people, uniting them in their interest to see a better future.

Why should you convene a dialogue?

If you live in the northern Great Plains and have a vested interest in the future of this region, you should start talking about and planning for it. Do you like things the way they are and want to retain that? Or do you think we can do better than we are? Both answers are reasons to start thinking and discussing your future.

Do it for yourself, your kids and/or your grandkids. Starting the conversation today can ensure a healthy, vibrant place for future generations.

Who should be invited?

As a convener, you will want to invite every person who has a stake in the future of this region. The best dialogues will be those that include people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Think about those people who are usually not invited to gatherings...make an effort to include and involve them.

These scenarios target the northern Great Plains region of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa, thus those citizens would have the greatest interest.

Invite services clubs, various organizations, churches, neighborhood or community associations, political parties and leaders, high school or post secondary classes, local book clubs, businesses, your friends and family. The list is endless!

What issues are in the scenarios?

The scenarios include issues and topics that are local, regional and global. They are relevant to this region and its people. Not every issue will impact everyone, but some will personally hit home.

And not every issue is included; you may find some missing that are important to you. We encourage you to discuss them and to let us know about them. We don't claim to have addressed everything; we just hope to spark conversation.

Some of the issues addressed include:

- Youth out migration
- Ecotourism
- Agriculture

- Environment and Natural Resources
- Change in population demographics
- Racism
- Collaboration
- Alternative Energy
- Technology
- Leadership Development
- Biofuels
- Poverty

Go beyond the stories

We encourage you to think beyond the issues in the stories. Is there an issue facing your community or organization right now? How would it fit in each of the stories? How could you, your family and/or your business be impacted? Encourage people to personalize the stories by finding themselves and their issues in them.

HOW TO HOST A DIALOGUE

Hosting a group dialogue is actually quite simple. All you need to do is, find a place, select a time, invite participants, and familiarize yourself with the scenarios and materials. The more prepared and familiar you are with the written and audio materials, the better you'll be able to lead and facilitate the discussion.

Remember that these scenarios are tools. You may choose to use one or all of them in anyway you desire. One scenario may speak to an issue your community or organization is dealing with, or you may want to lead a general discussion on the future of the region and use all four scenarios. Either way, we encourage you to spark conversation and use them to help improve life in your area.

We will offer a suggestion for the meeting agenda, but this is your meeting - feel free to adapt and personalize your own plan!

If you would like feedback or assistance in planning your dialogue, don't hesitate to contact us. We are happy to help!

Know your Audience

Before you begin planning for the dialogue, think about who your audience will be. Who did you invite? What is their background? Is it a diverse or homogenous group?

Different groups of people will react differently to the stories. Encourage people to avoid confrontation and instead use the discussions to learn

from each other. Remember, there is no 'official' or 'right' scenario. They are intended to provide a non-confrontational way to talk about the future. But please be prepared for handling arguments and strong, differing opinions. See *Tackling Tough Issues*.

Length of Dialogue

The length of the meeting is essentially up to you. We have found that devoting 2 hours works best. That way you can plan a half hour discussion for each scenario. But you may want 4 short sessions, focusing on one scenario each time, or you could do 2 sessions comparing 2 scenarios. Or you may choose to discuss only 1 scenario. The choice is yours.

Sequence of Stories

The order you present the stories is your choice and should reflect your audience. It may be best to start them off with a positive story, like *There's No Place Like Home* or perhaps with the worst case *The Big Empty*. You know your audience best, and should choose what will captivate and interest them early on.

Size of Group

The size of the group can be as large or as small as you are comfortable with. Our suggested meeting agenda is generally geared toward smaller meetings but can be adapted to accommodate any size group.

Dialogue Logistics

These dialogues can take place in a classroom, meeting room, coffee

shop, house or apartment, anywhere people gather to talk. We recommend the room be set up with small tables, as if you were going to have a dinner conversation with friends. The tables should seat no more than 4-6 people. It is important to make people feel welcome and open to sharing their thoughts with others. In our experience, the World Café format does just that.

The Scenario materials are available in audio and written format, and are available to download at www.meadowlarkproject.com. If you would like a CD version, or written materials sent to you, please contact us.

If you are playing the audio readings, be sure you have a sound system where everyone can hear.

Using the World Café Format

We suggest you use the World Café format to spark small group conversations. World Café is an innovative, simple methodology for hosting conversations that creates the opportunity for everyone to speak. It links and builds on the discussions as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights. World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group.

How To Do: World Café

The group, whether large or small, sits at tables of 4-6 people. Invite all of the tables to engage in a conversation about one or more specific scenarios. Give them 20-25 minutes to talk. Then have every person at a table except one move to

another table. In other words, one of them stays at their place, while each of the others finds a new table. People should not move as a group, but instead create new groups at the tables. Once they switch, ask them to continue talking about the same scenario(s). This way the conversation carries the insights and richness from one group to another, and allows for different people's perspectives. At the start of the new conversation, the person that stayed at their original table could provide a brief summary of what was discussed, as a way to spark conversation between the new group of participants. If they are willing, ask the person that stays at the table to take brief notes. We ask that you provide any feedback/notes to us.

This format can be repeated 2-3 times for discussions on 1-2 scenarios. Then start over with the discussion on the next 1-2 scenarios and repeat the process of moving among tables.

We have found that having a bell or other noisemaker to announce the time to change tables is helpful.

Starting the Dialogue

If there are people who don't know each other, it could be helpful to open the dialogue with a short Ice Breaker, followed by information about the Meadowlark Project.

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

An Ice Breaker is a short, fun exercise that gets people energized and networked with each other. This

is a great opportunity to celebrate the diversity in the room, while acknowledging the shared connection to your community.

Below you'll find a few examples that may help you, but feel free to use anything you are comfortable with.

Characterization Exercise:

Before arriving, make a list of personality traits or characteristics that the group may share. (around 5-10)

Examples for characteristics:

- Born in this community/state/region
- Have always lived in this community/state/region
- Grew up/live on a farm
- Have children

If the group is small and space is available, have them stand in a circle. Then read one characteristic out loud. Ask those who that describes, to step into the middle. Leave a short pause between readings, to allow them to see the common ground between each other. Then have the people step back before you state the next one.

If the group is larger and people are at tables, as in the World Café set up, have them stand up at their table if the characteristic describes them.

Truth, Truth, Lie: Ask participants to share two things about themselves that are true and one thing that is a lie. Have the group guess what is true and what's not. If the group is sitting at tables,

this can be done separately at each table.

Background on the Meadowlark Project

We find it's particularly helpful to provide background on how and why these scenarios were written.

Participants are likely to become more engaged if they know the background and the intentions of the group that created the stories.

For background materials, please visit www.meadowlarkproject.com or www.ngplains.org. If you still would like more information, please contact us.

Feedback

Since these dialogues are taking place across the region in many formats, we ask that you provide us with feedback to help us advance the facilitation and materials. The Feedback Form on the Meadowlark website has a few general questions, as well as specific opening and closing questions.

There are also guided discussion questions for each scenario to help you. When using these, it's important to have a recorder to provide written feedback about the scenarios and highlight the issues that arose. In the World Café model, each table should assign a recorder. (It seems to work best if the one person that stays stationary takes notes)

Be sure to collect the Feedback Forms at the end of the session and pass along to the Meadowlark Staff either via mail or email (ask@ngplains.org).

Possible Meeting Agenda

Again, this is just one idea; please make this meeting exciting and relevant for your group.

1. Ice Breaker (10 mins)
2. Convener provide general overview of the Meadowlark Project (5 mins)
3. Ask “Opening Question” (have them silently reflect and write down their answers on the Feedback Form) (5-7 mins)
 - a. What are some key indicators/signs of what is currently happening in this region? (this is included on the Feedback Form)
4. Play audio version of 1 or 2 scenarios (5-15 mins)
5. Begin the first World Café table discussion. *Be sure to assign a recorder to each group!*
6. After 15-20 minutes (depending on your time schedule) have participants change tables and repeat.
7. Optional: Have participants share something with the whole group that stood out to them. (10 mins)
8. Repeat steps 4, 5, 6 & (7) until all four scenarios have been discussed.
9. Ask “Closing Question” (have them silently reflect and write down answers on the Feedback Form) (5-7 mins)
 - a. What (if anything) do you intend to do differently in your personal or professional life or community, in response to these possible futures? (this is included on the Feedback Form)
10. Thank them! Let them know their input is valued and appreciated.
11. Have the group finish filling out the feedback forms and hand in on their way out.

TACKLING TOUGH ISSUES

These scenarios touch on economic, environment and social issues, which people may have personal feelings and opinions about. It is important to create a safe space where participants feel comfortable enough to open up and share. But in that sharing, disagreements can occur. As the convener, you will want to guide the participants through this in a productive, non-confrontational way. These suggestions can help you tackle these potentially heated discussions, should they occur.

At the start of the dialogue, it's important to state Group Norms, or ground rules. This will give everyone guidelines to follow during the dialogue that will help make sure participants are focused on the topics at hand and not confrontational or personal. Below you'll find a list of suggested norms, but be sure to ask the group if there is anything they would like to change (add or eliminate). They will adhere best when they agree to them. This

shouldn't be a time consuming task, rather just a few minutes to help create a safe, open space.

If the conversation at any table should get heated:

- Remind the group to uphold the group norms.
- Remind the group why they are here: for constructive input and to discuss possible regional futures.
- Don't disregard the argument. Acknowledge there is a difference of opinion and suggest that if it is a hindrance that people accept the difference and move onto another question/issue. If you just ignore it, larger problems will arise later.
- Take a breather. Give the group a short break. They often will calm down after reflecting. And remember, people will be changing tables in a few minutes.

Group Norms

- Be fully **present and engaged**. Turn off cell phones, BlackBerrys, etc.
- **Respect** each other and other's opinions.
- Really **listen**. Stay active in hearing what the other person has to say.
- It's **okay to disagree**. Don't make a difference of opinion a personal issue.
- **Suspend judgment**. Listen without judging.
- **Speak from the "I"**. Speak from your own perspectives and experiences. Avoid making assumptions about others.
- **Keep the space safe**. Do what you can to ensure others feel welcome and safe in sharing their thoughts.

TIPS FOR HOSTING A DIALOGUE

- **Make the space your own.** What type of environment will make this group feel welcome? Arrive early and have everything set up, so you are able to greet participants as they arrive. Again it is recommended that you use the World Café format.
- **Allow silence.** There will be times between discussions and in small groups, where there will be hesitance and silence, allow it. This can help people collect their thoughts and ease into conversation.
- **Be sure to hand out the abstracts of the 4 stories and allow participants time to read them.** Reading these brief overviews will help participants get into the story and understand where the stories are coming from.
- **If you will be playing the audio files be sure to check out the audio system before hand.** Playing the mp3s is a great to introduce people to the scenarios, especially those that haven't read them,
- **Consider the sequence of the stories.** Pay attention to the closing of the dialogue, you want them to leave feeling empowered and with a sense of hope. You won't want to end on the bleakest story.
- **Be open with people.** As you lead them through the event, be sure to tell them what you are doing and why.
- **Stick to the schedule.** Time is precious to people and staying on track will help guarantee their input and interest. If people are involved and want to stay longer or schedule another meeting, formally end the meeting and although them to do so afterwards or on their own.
- **Watch for what is not being said.** What issues are not included? The goal of the stories is to spark conversation. Not only conversation on the issues that are included, but those that aren't. This is especially important if you are using the scenario discussion as a catalyst for further discussions in your community about its future.
- **Some people may disagree with the stories or issues, use that disagreement as a catalyst to delve deeper into the conversation.** Why do they think or feel that way? What alternatives do they have to offer? Think about what these differences of opinion mean for your community's future.