

BUILDING OUR KANSAS FUTURE: *A HOW-TO CIVIC ACTION GUIDE FOR SHAPING THE FUTURE*



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BUILDING OUR KANSAS FUTURE: THE HOW-TO CIVIC ACTION GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Howdy folks! It's time we roll up our sleeves and get to work on crafting the futures for Kansas where we turn our ideas we dream of for our communities into reality- so we all can thrive. Strong communities are built on the foundation of neighbors who together realize they are powerful change agents in shaping the future of their communities.

Our aim is to equip individuals in community with each other to have the tools they need to transform and strengthen the fabric of their communities. Our futures are shared - what values will shape this future? Engaging in democracy and community at this fundamental level is critical for our short-term and long-term success. Developing the civic engagement and foresight skills empowers residents to take action aimed toward improving the future of their community. This guide provides a blueprint for engaging in futures thinking around an interest area/idea specific to you and your community and a series of prompts to help you begin to plan how to take action towards the ideas you wish to see in the community.

The path forward isn't always easy, but like we say here in Kansas, "Ad Astra Per Aspera" – to the stars through difficulty. **Let's get started building our thriving Kansas futures, shall we?**

PART 1: WHY FUTURES THINKING MATTERS

It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of today and feel powerless in shaping our tomorrows, but taking a moment to look ahead is key to shaping the kind of future we want for our towns, states, and nation. Futures thinking, or foresight, is all about using the past and present to imagine all the possibilities, and then choosing the ones that get us where we want to go.

Think of it like this: we're not just passengers on a train headed towards tomorrow. We're the conductors, and we get to help decide where the train goes. This guide will help you take time to look at the map, plan our trip, and get others all aboard!

By engaging in these foresight activities and taking action, we can:

- **Better Understand the Present:** Spot the trends and patterns happening right now that might affect Kansans down the road.
- **Identify Opportunities:** See the positive and negative possibilities for a better future that might not be obvious or seem possible.
- **Plan Strategically:** Make well-informed decisions about what actions we need to take today to get to that preferred future tomorrow.
- **Build Stronger Communities for the Future:** When we all have a shared vision for the future and feel powerful in shaping it, we can work together to make it happen- so our towns and cities are better for everyone.

PART 2: TOOLS FOR FORESIGHT

Alright, let's get to it! Here are a few tools we can use to unlock our own foresight thinking.

1. Signal Scanning:

Think of signal scanning as keeping your ear to the ground and your eyes on the horizon. It's about noticing the new information and events that are occurring all around us, both locally and internationally. A signal is a change from the norm. A new way of doing or seeing things. An innovation, a breakthrough, a fringe approach. Signals can be subtle or overt. They challenge the way things have always been. We often dismiss signals with a 'that will never work' attitude simply because they differ from what we expect and require us to slow down and use our imagination.

These signals, like ripples in a pond, can point to larger shifts in the future. What's happening in our schools? Is there some new technology or program being tested in another state or country that might be helpful here? Think of what you are seeing on the news, social media or other sources. Government changes, new innovations, and so much more could be considered signals for the future. From here, we can begin brainstorming how these signals might transform our future.

Activity Prompt:

Take a moment and think about your specific area of interest (Ex. Early Childhood Education, Environmental Health, Economic Well-Being, etc). What are some things that have you thinking about future changes in your area of interest? Searching the internet can be a helpful tool in discovering new signals quickly! Jot down 3-5 of these "signals" you're noticing, whether they're things you read in the paper or heard in a conversation, for your topic/interest area here:

PART 2: TOOLS FOR FORESIGHT

2. Horizon Mapping:

Now, let's take a deeper look at the present, near future, and dream future surrounding the issues you value. Horizon mapping is a way to organize our thoughts about different timeframes, so we can see how things might develop over time based on where we're at now and where you want the future to go:

- **Horizon 1 (Present):** This is the reality we're living in right now. It includes our current beliefs, challenges, and what folks are dealing with daily. It's the foundation we build from, and the past events, actions, and people that built it. The mindset here is that of the manager, focused on maintaining stability and keeping things running.
- **Horizon 2 (Near Future):** This is the space where we start to see shifts and changes happening. It's a transition zone where we challenge our assumptions and start exploring opportunities to adapt or try new things. It's a time of both incremental adjustments and transformational experiments. The mindset here is that of the entrepreneur, focused on creating and managing change.
- **Horizon 3 (Dream Future):** This is our radical vision of what we want the future to be for families and communities. What does a thriving, family-friendly Kansas look like to you? No limitations, just our boldest hopes! The mindset here is that of the visionary, focused on transformation and disruption of the present.

Activity Prompt: **Let's Start with Horizon 1**

Think about your specific area of interest again, and consider your community: What are the most common challenges families currently face? What are the existing support systems, and where are the gaps? What are the bright spots and areas of success in your community/interest area? What beliefs and experiences of the community have shaped the circumstances in which people find themselves today? Write down some thoughts about what and why the present situation looks like here:

PART 2: TOOLS FOR FORESIGHT

(Horizon 1 Brainstorm Continued)

PART 2: TOOLS FOR FORESIGHT

Activity Prompt: Now Let's Skip Ahead and Look at Horizon 3

Now, let your imagination soar. What would your ideal, most ambitious, best possible future look like for Kansas families in your area of interest? Think big. What supports would be in place? What are people able to do that they can't now? What kind of community would we have? How do families feel, day in and day out? There are no right or wrong answers, and don't let the fear of impossibility limit the ideas you list!

Write down your ideas for a radically transformed future here:

PART 2: TOOLS FOR FORESIGHT

Activity Prompt: Now let's look at Horizon 2 (Near Future)

This is the trickiest horizon because it's all about exploring the "in-between" space, the journey from today's challenges to our dream future. Horizon 2 is where we challenge those assumptions of the present and where those old ways clash with the new. We'll ask ourselves some questions:

- Looking at the present (Horizon 1) and our future vision (Horizon 3), what are some of the emerging changes that will require our current systems to adapt?
- Which of our current assumptions are most vulnerable to these changes?
- How can we respond to these changes with innovative solutions?
- What current systems might be replaced with emerging practices or technology?
- What are projects/ideas that could be built in the near future that could help realize your dream future?

Write down some ideas about that transition space of Horizon 2, those "in-between" adjustments, here:

PART 3: POWER BUILDING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

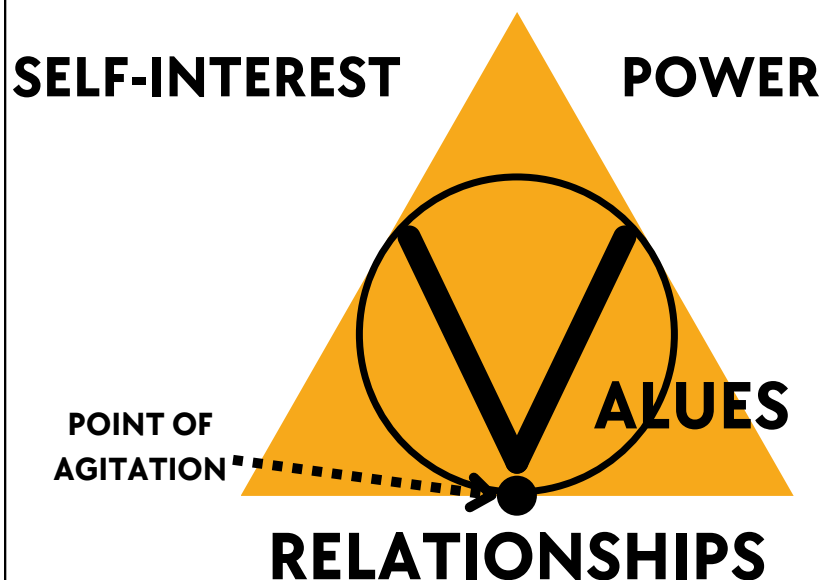
Imagining the future is powerful, but building the power to make it real is essential. Community organizing is all about bringing people together around a shared issue, using their collective strengths to create change and transform our futures.

The Power Triangle: Self-Interest & Values

Effective community organizing relies on connecting with other's values. At the heart of any movement, there are people who are impacted by that change, and who have a reason to participate. This means that organizing is about inviting more and more people into the project, not just getting the work done. Power is organized people and/or resources that can create or stop change- through shared power. To get to that "shared power" dynamic, it is critical to learn how to leverage and connect with other's values around your interest area and dreams for the future. Effective organizing can have a lasting impact on increasing the involvement of folks we connect with, and the more leaders that invest their time in building for our future- the more obtainable those future visions are!

When we are inviting people in and seeking to understand what makes them who they are, we have to understand the ways in which the three things work together:

- **Self-Interest:** What makes this issue relevant to you and others involved? Why should they care?
- **Values:** What are their deepest held beliefs about what's right and wrong, and fair or not?
- **Power:** Who has power to impact your interest area? Are they elected officials, community leaders, interest groups, or others who can help with your interest area?
- **Agitation to Action:** How can we put those self-interests and values into practice so we create sustained and organized energy? Who do you need to build relationships with to move them towards action?



The Values Triangle is a useful tool in analyzing the self-interest, power, and values of people impacted by an issue.

Understanding these helps community organizers build relationships with others to "agitate" them towards action. By connecting their self-interest & power to an action that aligns with their values- we build support for our cause in shaping the future!

PART 3: POWER BUILDING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Activity Prompt: Preparing to Organize & Build Power for Our Future

Take a moment to reflect on your specific area of interest again:

- Why does this issue matter to you? What is your self-interest in making change?
- What values do you bring to this work? What are other values that are connected to your interest area of the future?
- Who has power to impact your area of interest? What are their values and self-interest regarding the issue?
- What actions would you most like to see taken? What changes in community, law, programs, or culture do you wish to see?
- Consider this for yourself and think of 5-10 people in your community who might also care about this and be individuals to build power with.

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN

Now, let's get practical. Here's how to build a campaign that can make a real difference in building power and awareness around your interest area to drive transformative change towards the futures you envision.

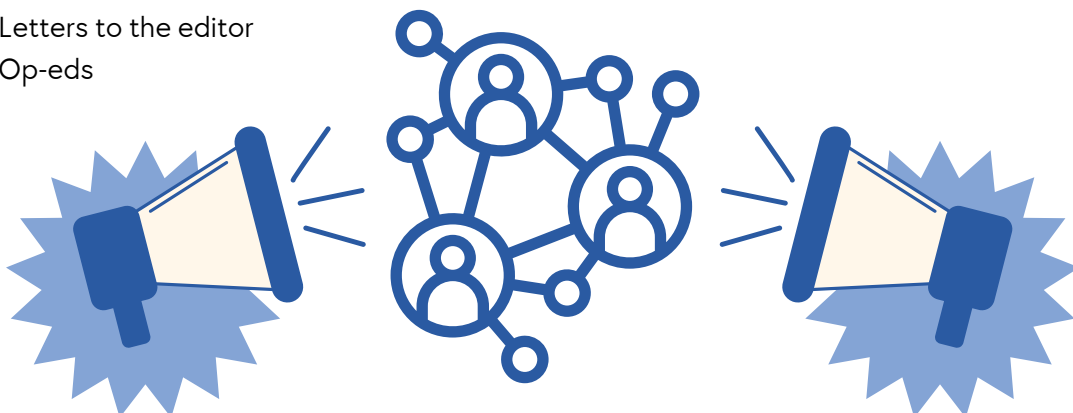
Campaigns can be broken down into three key phases: **Recruit, Engage, and Mobilize.**

Phase 1: Recruitment - Gathering Your Team & Community

Recruitment is all about finding the folks who care as much as you do and want to be part of the solution. Think of it as building your team of champions!

Recruitment Tactics:

- **Events:** Host meetings, workshops, or town halls where people can learn and connect.
- **Online:** Use social media, websites, and email to spread the word and gather supporters.
- **Word-of-mouth:** Encourage current supporters to invite friends and neighbors.
- **Partnerships:** Reach out to existing groups and ask them to support you, and then support them.
- **Community outreach:** Meet people where they gather - festivals, fairs, schools- and so many more places in your community to connect with future advocates.
- **Political Engagement:** Connect with elected officials who have successfully advocated for similar programs to invite them to be champions for the efforts in your community. Keep in mind that it is not lobbying to ask people to contact legislators to raise awareness about a general policy issue or to influence an administrative action. But if your communication refers to legislation or legislative proposals and asks people to contact legislators, then it is lobbying. You can do this outreach through numerous channels:
 - Letters to legislators or community leaders
 - Phone calls to legislators or to members of the community during a recruitment push
 - Social media posts and shares
 - Blogs
 - Public service announcements
 - Letters to the editor
 - Op-eds



PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- RECRUITMENT

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

WHO ARE YOUR ALLIES? WHO HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY, OR WHO HAS EXPERIENCE IN YOUR AREA OF INTEREST?

WHO COULD BE POWERFUL SPOKESPEOPLE? WHO HAS CREDIBILITY WITH DECISION MAKERS AND CAN SPEAK PASSIONATELY ABOUT THE ISSUE?

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS MIGHT PARTNER WITH YOU? WHAT GROUPS IN YOUR COMMUNITY SHARE SIMILAR VALUES AND MIGHT WANT TO WORK WITH YOU ON THIS PROJECT?

WHO ARE YOUR LIKELY OPPONENTS? WHO MIGHT RESIST CHANGE, AND HOW CAN YOU ANTICIPATE THEIR ARGUMENTS?

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- RECRUITMENT

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

HOW CAN YOU AUTHENTICALLY ENGAGE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, RURAL FOLKS, AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

WHO ARE YOUR "EVERYDAY ADVOCATES?" WHO ARE THE FOLKS IN THE COMMUNITY WHO ARE IMPACTED BY YOUR AREA OF INTEREST?

WHERE CAN YOU GATHER PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THIS ISSUE ON PEOPLE?

WHERE CAN YOU FIND THESE PEOPLE? CONSIDER PLACES WHERE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE IS ALREADY AT - MEETINGS, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, FESTIVALS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND MORE.

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- ENGAGEMENT

Phase 2: Engagement- Building Relationships & Knowledge

Once you've recruited folks to your cause, this is the perfect time to start building relationships and engaging members of your team. Stay in regular communication with your advocates so that they remain engaged, informed, and ready to take action when you need. Start building relationships with the media, who tend to respond best to people who are organized, clear, polite, and have newsworthy things for them to write about.

Engagement Tactics:

- **Regular meetings:** Keep advocates informed and connected.
- **Training workshops:** Develop advocates into spokespeople.
- **Social media campaigns:** Share images, stories, and calls to action highlighting your cause and educating the public.
- **Media outreach:** Connect with newspapers, radio, and TV stations.
- **Community forums:** Host discussions and share knowledge.

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

HOW WILL YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR ADVOCATES? WILL YOU BE DOING REGULAR CHECK-INS, CREATING GROUP CHATS, OR MEETING IN-PERSON OR VIRTUALLY REGULARLY?

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- ENGAGEMENT

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

HOW WILL YOU KEEP ADVOCATES INFORMED ABOUT PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND UPCOMING ACTIONS?

HOW CAN YOU EMPOWER DIVERSE COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BECOME EFFECTIVE SPOKESPEOPLE?

HOW CAN YOU INCLUDE THE COMMUNITY IN DECISION MAKING? WHOSE VOICES ARE REPRESENTED, WHOSE ARE NOT?

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- ENGAGEMENT

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

HOW CAN YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHARE YOUR MESSAGE AND ENGAGE PEOPLE ONLINE?

WHAT ARE SOME POTENTIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES? WOULD LOCAL NEWSPAPERS OR TV STATIONS BE INTERESTED IN COVERING THE ISSUE AND THE VOICES INVOLVED?

WHAT KIND OF MARKETING MATERIALS FOR YOUR CAUSE COULD REACH YOUR COMMUNITY? DO THEY MAKE SENSE TO DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES YOU ARE TRYING TO ENGAGE?

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- MOBILIZATION

Phase 3: Mobilization - Taking Action Together

Mobilization is when we put all our hard work into action. We'll call on the advocates and use our skills and knowledge to take a stand and make a difference.

After your team has recruited and engaged the public, it is now time to mobilize them to take action on opportunities that advance your interest area cause for the future!

Mobilization Tactics:

- **Action alerts:** Send emails and texts with specific requests for advocates to action on.
- **Media events:** Call on media for support and get coverage of your futures idea.
- **Day at the Capitol/Townhall:** Organize a lobby day or event at the city commission.
- **Phone banks:** Engage with members of the community and have calls to action.
- **Op-Eds:** Write persuasive pieces to appear in local newspapers.
- **Days of Action:** Gathering like-minded advocates to send a statement to leaders and the community, elevate awareness of your cause and increase pressure towards civic change! From fundraising activities, protests, and days of volunteering there are so many ways to gather your advocates to help advance your cause/project that aligns with your future vision- get creative!

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

WHAT ACTIONS WILL YOU ASK YOUR ADVOCATES TO TAKE? (E.G., CONTACTING LEGISLATORS, GOING TO CITY COUNCIL, FUNDRAISING, ATTENDING A RALLY, OR SHARING STORIES?)

PART 4: BUILDING YOUR CIVIC ACTION PLAN- MOBILIZATION

Questions to Consider and Answer In the Spaces Below

HOW WILL YOU ORGANIZE AND EXECUTE THESE ACTIONS? WILL THERE BE A TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR EACH ONE?

WILL YOU HOST ACTION EVENTS, LIKE PRESS CONFERENCES, PROTESTS, OR DAYS OF ACTION? HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THE EVENT AMPLIFIES YOUR CAUSE?

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR YOUR DAYS OF ACTIONS? WILL YOUR ADVOCATES FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING TO THEIR LEGISLATORS OR NEIGHBORS, WHAT WOULD YOUR GOALS BE?

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CONCLUSION

As we draw this guide to a close, remember that the future of Kansas is not a predetermined destination, but a journey we embark on together. It's about more than just envisioning a better tomorrow; it's about actively building the power to make that vision a reality. Embrace the tools and strategies outlined here, not only to analyze and dream, but to organize, mobilize, and advocate for the changes you wish to see. This guide is not a complete list of tools and strategies, there are so many more to explore as you brainstorm and take action in civic and community engagement.

The power to shape our communities lies within each of us, and it grows exponentially when we unite with others who share our passion and values. Seek out those who resonate with your vision for the future, amplify diverse voices, and work collectively to navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Let's move forward, hand in hand, creating a Kansas where everyone can thrive, and where our shared dreams become our lived reality.

WHAT'S NEXT & CONNECTING FOR ASSISTANCE

Connect with us at Thrive Kansas's website at the QR code to review our digital resources and to reach out directly for more information! We'd love to connect with anyone utilizing this resource, if you'd like help brainstorming or discussing your ideas we are here to support and dream alongside you. The Kansas Civic Network and KU's Future Fellows collaborated on the creation of this guide and are valuable partners for any Kansans engaging in community building for the future.



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