

QUESTIONS MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED ABOUT A FUTURE SEARCH

1. What is the intent of a future search?

A future search is intended to engage a cross section of people who are stakeholders in an organization in creating a shared future direction for that organization. It includes a group of 45-60 people who are invited to be together in the same room for two days to share their thinking and to find the common ground of what they want the future to be.

2. How does this differ from strategic planning?

A future search focuses on the long-range view of an organization....the big picture. The premise is that if you can define where you want to go in the next three to five years, then the next step is developing a strategic plan to move in that direction. It is starting a planning process that engages the thinking of a diverse group of stakeholders to advise about a direction that becomes the framework for establishing the details of how to get there. A future search conference focuses on the thinking that needs to precede strategic planning. (Creators of the process are Marvin Weisbord & Barbara Janoff) See futuresearch.net for more info.

3. How is the planning conference time used? What do the participants do?

The two days include many opportunities for sharing ideas in small groups and finding the common ground of those ideas within the larger group. A variety of activities result in creating a database of all the ideas in the room. That database is designed to enhance thinking, to broaden perspectives and to look for patterns of shared direction.

The process engages participants in activities that focus on some key questions.....

- What has happened in the **past** that has influenced where we are today, and what should we remember as we plan for the future?
- What do I know about the **current reality** that I want to retain or modify or eliminate in the future?
- What are the **trends in society** today that may be on the horizon and will eventually impact us?
- What is my personal description of how I would want it to be in the next three to five years.... if I could have it **the way I truly want it to be**?
- What is the **shared direction among all of the participants**? The common ground of our thinking...even though there are differences, what is it that we can build upon?
- How do we get started to develop a **plan to move in that direction**?

4. What will be the product at the end of the two days?

The outcome will be a set of themes, probably five to eight, which represent a direction for the organization. They will be broad, big picture ideas, but the themes express the common ground or shared sense of direction of the participants. The themes will need some 'polishing', so a very small writing team will need to translate the group's work into a well written vision statement. The "how to get there" planning is in the next step in the process. That strategic planning will include developing the strategies and action steps, time line, and resources needed for implementation.

Another outcome from most future searches is the sense of community, ownership, and commitment that develops as participants share their wants and wishes for the organization. Many participants express an interest in continuing to be associated with the organization as it moves to the strategic implementation of the shared direction.