



Strategic Foresight Signals Teams

This document describes the process to set up and operate an Envision Signals Team. Any organization should be able to apply a similar process to establish and activate signals teams around key issues that their organization may be facing.

Background

Envision is applying Strategic Foresight at the community level. One of our primary goals is to provide a framework for local leaders (business, government, nonprofit, education, and labor) to use in making decisions that advance Greater Green Bay as a community of choice.

Mission To guide our community toward a thriving future based on proven foresight strategies.

Vision Community leaders identify trends, events, and choices to systematically drive decisions toward a thriving, preferred future.

Assumptions of Futuring and Strategic Foresight

- The future cannot be accurately known or predicted in detail.
- The future is not predetermined.
- The future can be influenced by actions today by individuals and/or organizations.

Envision Signals Teams

What are the goals of Signals Teams?

- Identify and analyze signals of change that may have a significant impact on each broad topical area (domain) for the Greater Green Bay area.
- Identify the key drivers that affect the domain, for better or worse.
- Share those signals of change and key drivers, using stories and narratives around plausible futures and trend cards describing forces and factors underlying them, with the Envision Board and the broader community as a framework for informed decision making.
- Annually challenge and update the team's work product to incorporate changes and insights gathered from signals, experts and key stakeholders.

Signals Team Composition

There are several layers to the Envision Signals Team structure.

- Signals team leaders – A steering committee comprised of the leaders of each Signals Team which sets the annual objectives, task list and timeline leading up to the annual World Futures Day event. The current timeline is included in **Appendix A**.
- Mentors – Each Signals Team is assigned a University of Houston trained mentor to facilitate discussions, maintain the integrity of the process and introduce strategic foresight approaches and templates to assist the team.
- Board members – The core members of each Signals Team are drawn from the Envision board where they receive a basic level of strategic foresight training and instruction in the signals team process.
- Associate members – Additional non-board members who participate fully in the team’s efforts based on the process described in this document.
- Key stakeholders – Organizations in the community who bring subject matter expertise and are positioned to act on the findings of the Signals Teams.

Signals Team Core Tools

The signals team process centers around research and analysis. The following tools are used to assist in the collection and refinement of those results. Proficiency in the use of these tools is something all team members should strive for.

- **Raindrop.io** – An all-in-one bookmark manager that allows users to save and organize links, articles, videos, and other content from the web. Its primary use is in the scanning phase of the signals process. See **Appendix B** for more information.
- **ChatGPT** – A large language model chatbot created by OpenAI. Two of the most challenging activities of the signals teams are the search and summarization of team results. Large language AI apps can help speed that process. Tips on using AI are noted throughout this document. Alternatives to ChatGPT include Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot and Perplexity. Basic instructions in the use of ChatGPT are included in **Appendix C**.
- **Google Alerts, X and Other Sources** – Signals are best drawn from a broad range of sources including articles, posts, podcasts, papers, etc. Google Alerts provides links to articles related to key words or phrases. X (formerly Twitter) is where ongoing postings and comments can provide clues to weak signals and avenues to follow subject matter experts. Other sources, include social media posts (e.g. LinkedIn, FaceBook), published papers from trade or research organizations, and general internet searches. It is best to cast a broad net and narrow the focus as the best signals and sources become clear. See **Appendix D** for more information on setting up and using these research tools.

AI TIP

Google Alert Keywords

Use ChatGPT to find or refine suggested keywords for your Google Alerts. “I’d like some key words to use for Google Alerts related to *your subject of interest*.”

ChatGPT will return core keywords, tips on seeking trends, and variations to tailor your alerts.

You can also use AI to identify “fringe signals” by asking it to use Amy Webb’s concept of “fringe signals”.

Signals Team Collaboration Tools

As the signals team gathers and documents its findings, there is a need for collaborative editing by multiple team members. The method for doing this is left to the discretion of each team.

- **Microsoft Office365 Teams** – The preferred method for collaborative editing is Microsoft Office365 Teams. Each team has a dedicated Teams channel and each Signals Team member is connected as a guest of the channel via their personal email address. Documents can be shared by all team members simultaneously. Microsoft Teams channels and guest access are managed by a member of the Envision Greater Green Bay administrative team. See **Appendix E** for more information.
- **Other Collaboration Methods** – Absent Microsoft Office365, collaboration may be done through other methods such as email attachments and GoogleDocs.

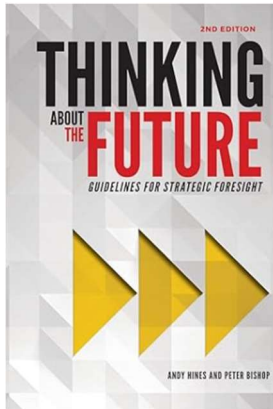
Signals Team Templates

The output of the Signals Team is presented in a variety of standard formats which can be found in the Signals portal of the Envision Greater Green Bay website. The portal is password protected. A list of the templates is included in **Appendix F**.

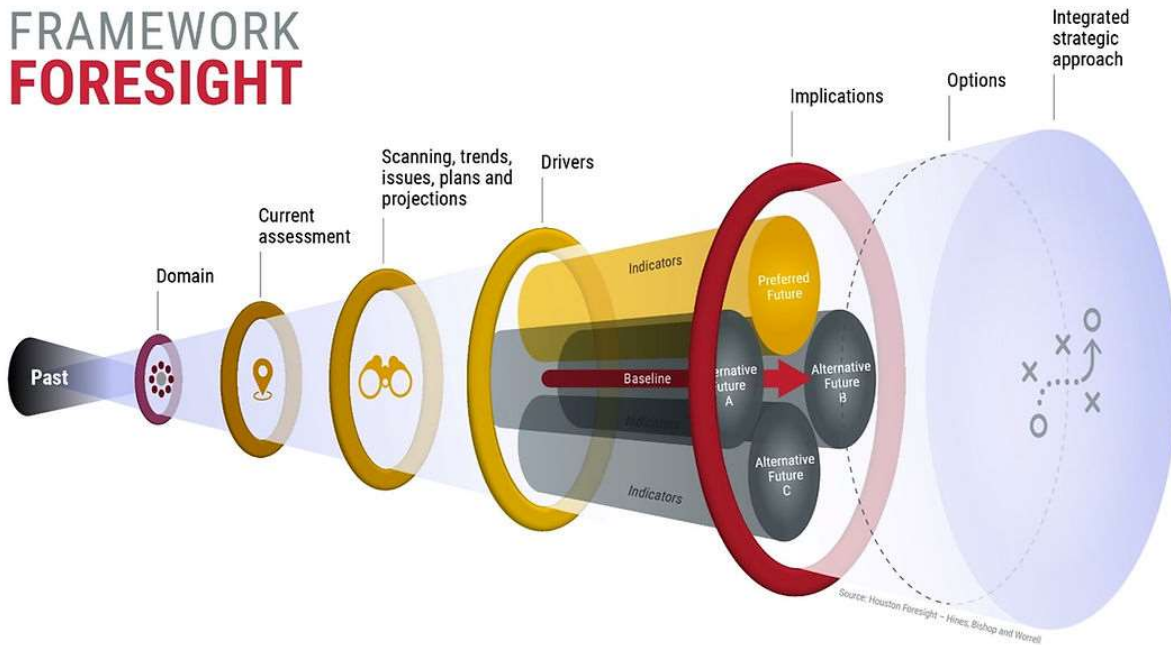
Using AI as a Signals Tool

AI has a lot to offer in gathering, organizing, and summarizing signals and trends. Like any tool, results vary depending on how it is used. **Appendix G** provides some useful tips on how to apply ChatGPT or other large language model app to the Foresight signals process. Tips include how to structure your AI request, and how to use AI to summarize trends or themes, and includes specific tips from the University of Houston Foresight program to find longer term, weak signals with horizon 3 implications.

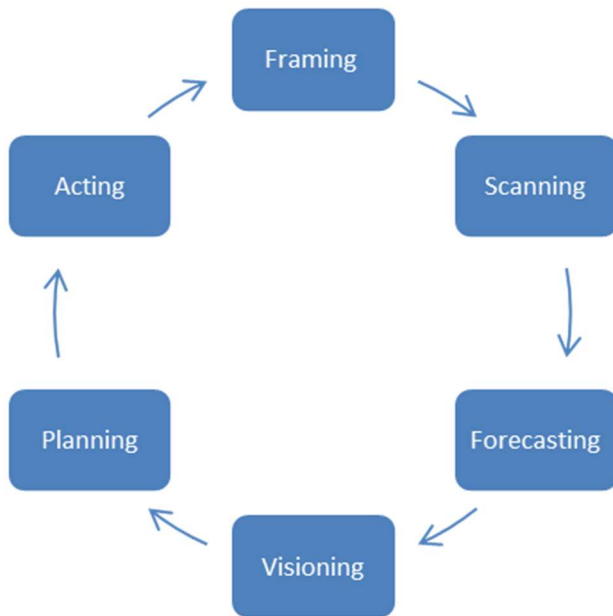
Strategic Foresight Process: The Houston Model



The Envision Signals Teams follow the University of Houston strategic foresight process. The approach and more specific guidance in its application can be found in the book Thinking about the Future: Guidelines for Strategic Foresight, 2nd Edition by Andy Hines and Peter Bishop. The process flows in a continuous cycle of discovery, analysis and action through six phases as shown on the next page. Each phase is documented in one or more standard formats and updated continually as the phase is revisited.



Foresight Process



Framing defines the scope and focus of the problem or subject area of the signals team. Systems thinking is utilized to create a Domain Map of the topic under study. It determines what is included in the project and what is excluded. Framing establishes the team's objectives, structure, key stakeholders and provides a Current Assessment of the topic under study.

Scanning: This is where we begin to look for signals of change from outside sources that provide indications of how the future might unfold.

Forecasting is where signals are analyzed to identify underlying drivers and shifts or trends that might affect the future.

Visioning is the process of developing scenarios regarding the plausible futures of the area under study. The plausible futures generally include:

- *The Baseline or Continuation.* This is perhaps the most common scenario. It basically indicates what the future will be if we keep doing what we are doing now.
- *The New Equilibrium.* In this future, the organization or area under study responds to immediate changes in the environment and hits a stabilizing plateau. When there are significant changes in the environment, another round of adjustment will be necessary to reach equilibrium.
- *Decline and Collapse.* In this future, the organization does not respond to changes in the environment and gradually declines or ultimately may completely go out of existence.
- *The Transformation.* This is a future in which the organization looks well into the future, perhaps as far as 10 years, and transforms itself to be successful in this new long-range future.
- *The Preferred.* This is the future an organization decides is the one they see in their future.

Planning is the process of identifying what needs to be done to avoid some of the alternative futures and to achieve the Preferred future.

Acting is carrying out the organization's plan to achieve the Preferred future.