



Future Proof Your Strategy: The Power of Scenario Thinking

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Armstrong McGuire



About Armstrong McGuire

Leadership Development

Interim Management | Retreats, Training, and Coaching | Executive Search, Talent Acquisition, and Transitions | Succession Planning

Organizational Development

Operational Planning and Alignment | Organizational Assessment
Strategic Planning

Philanthropy and Fundraising

Philanthropic Strategy | Capital Campaign Readiness and Feasibility | Resource Development Planning

Founded in 2004
Based in NC
Partnering nationally



About Me

- Corporate geek turned nonprofit advocate
- Dog mom to Banjo
- Connector of systems and stories



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Scenario Thinking

Defining scenario thinking

- A deliberate, forward-looking process
- A flexible approach that strengthens adaptability and resilience
- Opportunity to test strategies and build engagement and impact



**Why does scenario thinking matter,
especially now?**

Scenario Thinking

- Not just worst case
- Most likely case
- Good case
- Better case
- Best case

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**What types of scenarios could
potentially impact your organization?**

Potential scenarios to consider

- Social and demographic shifts
- Economic and financial conditions
- Political and policy changes
- Environmental and climate-related events
- Technological disruption
- Public health and human services crises
- Workforce and organizational culture shifts
- Philanthropic and donor behavior changes
- Reputation and trust shifts

Scenario Evaluation

Scenario Evaluation



Scenario evaluation inputs

- Strategic plan
- Budget
- Current financial statements
- Grant agreements
- Program data and impact metrics
- Donor metrics
- Organization chart
- Community needs assessments

Scenario Evaluation

Implications *(How might this scenario change our playing field?)*

- What would this mean for our mission, programs, and people?
- How would our priorities, resources, or operations need to shift?

Risks *(What could go wrong or cause harm?)*

- What vulnerabilities would this scenario expose in our organization or partners?
- What might happen if we fail to respond quickly or effectively?

Opportunities *(Where could we add value or lead?)*

- What new partnerships, strategies, or roles could emerge for us in this scenario?
- How could we turn this change into an advantage for our mission and community?

Scenario Evaluation Example

Scenario: What if a climate-related disaster hits your region, shifting community needs dramatically?

Implications

- Immediate surge in demand for basic needs services (housing, food, healthcare, crisis response).
- Long-term recovery displaces or transforms existing programs, requiring a pivot in delivery models.
- Staff burnout and infrastructure damage reduce organizational capacity.
- Collaboration and resource-sharing across sectors become essential for community stabilization.
- Increased public awareness of vulnerability may drive attention to climate resilience, equity, and systems change.

Risks

- Disruption to operations, fundraising events, and donor pipelines.
- Competing relief efforts crowd out attention to ongoing programs.
- Overextension of staff and volunteers leading to attrition.
- Decline in unrestricted funding as donors prioritize short-term relief.
- Community trust may erode if nonprofits appear unprepared or inconsistent in response.

Scenario Evaluation Example

Scenario: What if a climate-related disaster hits your region, shifting community needs dramatically?

Opportunities

- Lead or participate in a regional resilience coalition to coordinate response and share data.
- Develop flexible funding and emergency response mechanisms (e.g., disaster funds, adaptive budgeting).
- Expand partnerships with government, corporate, and philanthropic sectors for collective impact.
- Strengthen community trust by demonstrating responsiveness, transparency, and mission-centered leadership.
- Invest in staff wellness, digital infrastructure, and scenario readiness for future crises.

Implications + Risks + Opportunities = Potential Strategies

Scenario Evaluation Example

Scenario: What if a climate-related disaster hits your region, shifting community needs dramatically?

Potential Strategies

Strategy 1: Strengthen Emergency Readiness

Develop clear plans, flexible funding, and trained teams so the organization can respond quickly and maintain stability during future disasters.

Strategy 2: Lead Community Collaboration

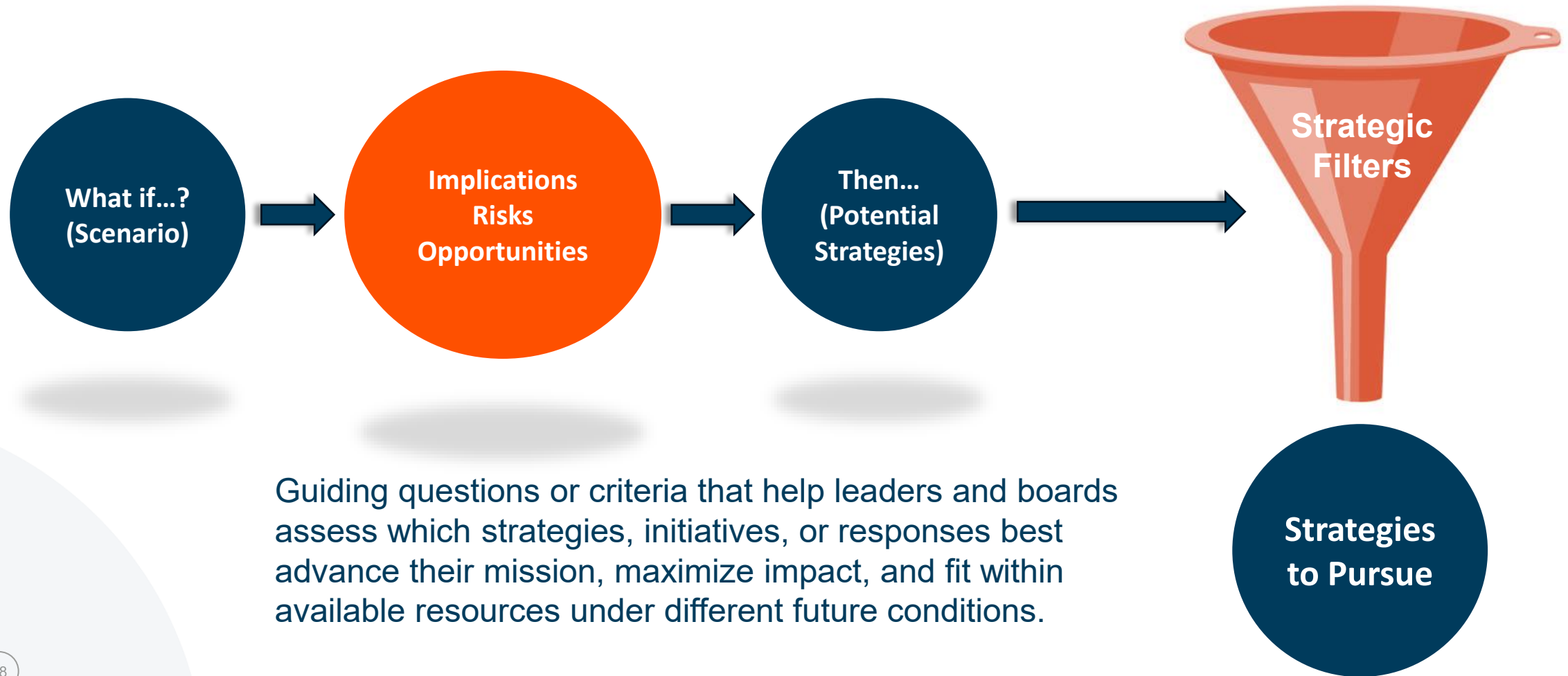
Unite nonprofits, funders, and local agencies to coordinate relief efforts, share information, and align long-term recovery goals for greater impact.

Strategy 3: Rebuild for Long-Term Resilience

Integrate climate resilience, equity, and staff wellbeing into programs and infrastructure to strengthen the organization and community over time.

Strategic Filters

Strategic Filters



Strategic Filters

Mission Alignment

How well does our mission and vision hold up under this scenario, and would our purpose remain relevant or need adjustment?

Impact Potential

Can we still advance our key priorities and meaningfully address the community's most pressing needs?

Organizational Capacity

Do we have the people, systems, and leadership to respond effectively under these conditions?

Financial Resilience

How would our funding and reserves be affected, and could we sustain programs without compromising long-term stability?

Stakeholder Relationships

How might our relationships with funders, partners, and policymakers shift, and which would become most critical to maintain?

Strategic Filters

Risk Exposure

What new operational, reputational, or financial risks could emerge, and which would be most urgent to address?

Opportunity Leverage

What new opportunities or leadership roles could we take on in this environment?

Adaptability and Speed

How quickly could we adjust strategy and operations, and what barriers might slow our response?

Equity and Inclusion Impact

How would this scenario affect marginalized communities, and would our work help close gaps or risk widening them?

Scenario Thinking In Practice

Practicing scenario evaluation

- Convene in groups of 3-5
- As a group, select a scenario from the list provided on the next page
- For that scenario, identify **implications, risks, and opportunities**; aim for 3-5 in each category
- Identify 2-3 **potential strategies** to address the selected scenario

Potential Scenarios

Funding Cliff

A large multi-year government grant that supports 40% of your operating budget is not renewed. Your team must decide whether to adjust programs, pursue new revenue, or merge with another organization.

Population Shift

New residents moving into North Carolina bring an influx of families, professionals, and retirees who are eager to get involved locally. Your nonprofit experiences higher volunteer interest, new donors, and growing demand for your programs in expanding communities.

AI Utilization

Your organization begins using AI tools to automate tasks and improve reporting. Efficiency increases, but staff worry about data privacy, accuracy, and job security. Donors appreciate faster updates, while some community members miss personal connection.



**What implications, risks, opportunities,
and strategies did you identify?**

Practicing strategic filters

- Review your potential strategies against the strategic filters
- Identify which strategies to pursue



**How did the strategic filters influence
your potential strategies?**



**How, and with whom, might you
use this tool?**

Share your feedback

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