

Backcasting

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| Engagement range | Partnership-Delegation Tends to facilitate high level of stakeholder participation in decision. |
| Difficulty level | Medium to hard |
| Cost | Medium to high (\$1,000 - 10,000) depends on complexity of the task and the range of resources used |
| When might you use it | To showcase a product, a plan or a policy To develop community capacity To develop an action plan |
| Number of people required to help organise | Depends on the audience size and level of complexity but could be organised by a single person. Two to three people may be needed where back casting is run with a larger audience and where a range of resources are used in the process. |
| Audience numbers it suits | Up to 30 people |
| Timeframe | Six weeks to six months depending on the scope of the task |
| Issues/resources to think about | Venue; Catering; Publicity; Staffing; Moderator/facilitator; Recorders; Audiovisual recording equipment and amplification; Overhead projectors; Data projectors; Screens; White boards; Printed public information sheets; Response sheets; Props for working in groups (pens, paper, pins, etc.); special needs requirements (wheelchair access, children's requirements) |
| Innovation level | Can be highly innovative |

Description

Backcasting is a method of analysing alternative futures, often energy futures. Its major distinguishing characteristic is a concern with how desirable futures can be attained. It involves working backward from a desired future endpoint or set of goals to the present to determine the physical feasibility of that particular future and the policy measures required to reach that end point. End-points are usually chosen for a time 25 to 50 years in the future.

Backcasting is similar to visioning, however backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will be, but rather to weigh up a number of possible futures, and decide the implications and preferable options, then to map out steps along the way.

Objective

- To weigh up the implications of different future options or policy goals.

Desired Outcome

- One preferred option from a number of future possibilities, and a series of ways that the desired endpoint can be achieved.

Uses/Strengths

- Backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will likely be, but to indicate the relative feasibility and implications of different policy goals.
- Suggests the implications of likely futures, chosen not on the basis of their likelihood but on the basis of other criteria defined externally to the analysis (e.g. criteria of social or environmental desirability).
- Determines the freedom of action, in a policy sense, with respect to possible futures.

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- No estimate of likelihood is possible.
- Does not seek to discover the underlying structural features of the world that would cause the future to come about.

Step by Step Guide

1. Define future goals and objectives, projecting 25-50 years into the future.
2. Specify the scenario by analysing the technological and physical characteristics of a path that would lead towards the specified goals.
3. Evaluate the scenario in terms of physical, technological and socioeconomic feasibility and policy implications.
4. Brainstorm ways this desired endpoint can be achieved, working backwards to the present.