

The background is a solid dark blue. It features several diagonal lines in white, light blue, and light green. Small white dots are placed at the ends of some of these lines. The text is in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

RIDICULOUSLY HOPEFUL FUTURES

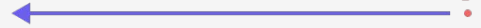
June 2025

Judi Brown & Leah Tremblay-Adams, CivicMarkers.com
Hillary Carey, JustVisions.co

Why we did this

**“We will collaboratively craft
a compelling vision of a future
in which using HCD and inclusion of
customer voices in policy and
decision-making is standard practice”**

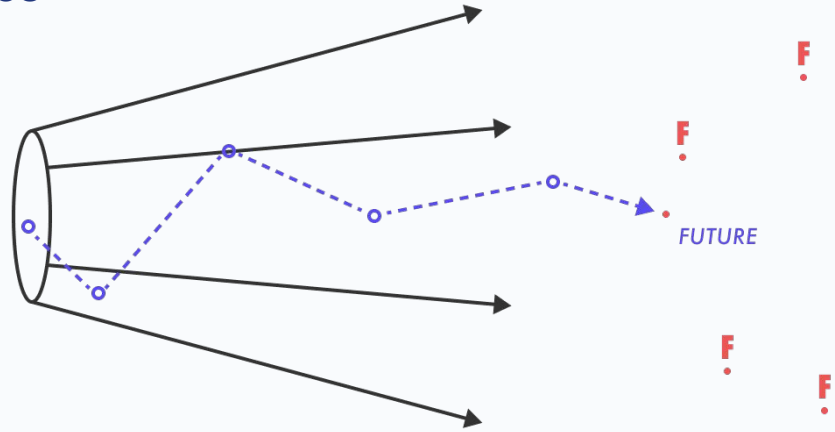
- Grant proposal to
Digital Harbor Foundation



Get **specific** about what we want in
the future, to **spark** ideas and dialog.

How we did this

- Design Futures + Co-Design
 - Collective Visioning
 - Participatory Experiential Futures



What we did

- HCD in Govt (Virginia Hamilton)
 - + Civic Design (CivicMakers)
 - + Design Futures (Hillary Carey)
- Collective Visioning Workshops
- Experiential Futures development
- Co-Design with lived experience experts
- User testing the Participatory Experiential Futures
- Lots of logistics to invite County partners to 5 immersive workshops

Step 1: Collective Visioning



“We need to move from *competitive* ideation to *collective imagination*. [...] Having ideas that come from, and work for, more people”

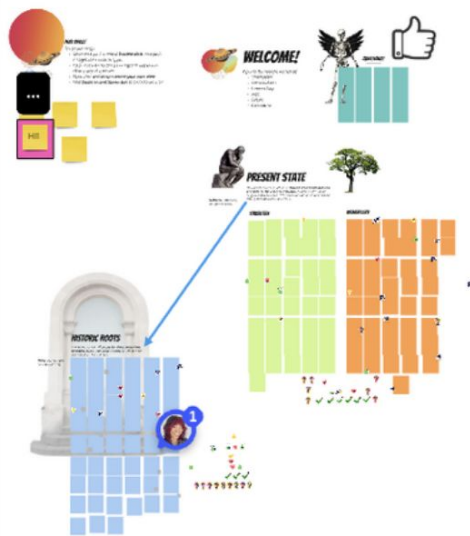
- adrienne maree brown,
Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds



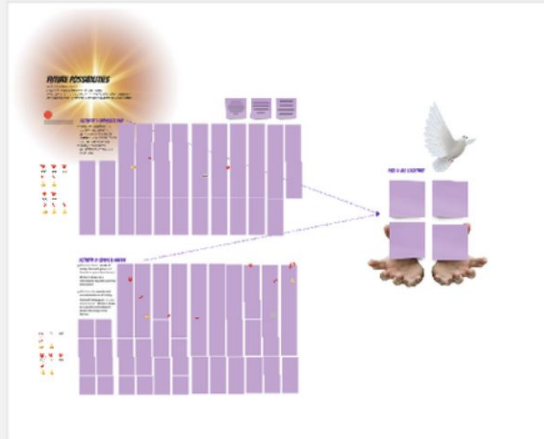
What is Collective Visioning?

- Practices from futures studies combined with liberatory, participatory design to foster collective visions of possible and preferable futures.

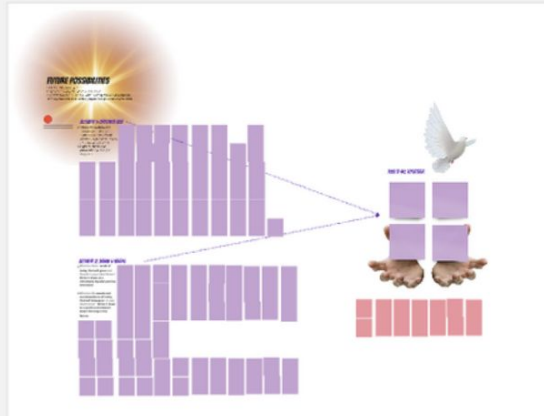
START HERE



Breakout Room 1



Breakout Room 2



1. Present
2. Past
3. Future



Agenda: Imagining New Possibilities

1. Intro to the project
2. Intro to each other
3. Describe the **present** state
4. Look back to the **history**
5. Imagine what a **better future** could contain
6. Wrap up



Synthesis: The present good = our values

What we value

And is currently growing



What we value
And is
currently
frustrating

[illegible]

The future = our aspirations

new kinds of services for "climate refugees" for example, to help people relocate and thrive in new places

Public Data and information can be safely queried by any/all public servants to inform decisions (LLM/GPT assists)

People will be able to imagine a future that holds possibility for them and respond generously to that


Government is where you work to solve the world's biggest Challenges!

People will affirm their story is not everyone's story - respect for difference will flourish

100
Project approval lifecycle and procurement processes will have to streamline or disappear

Government will be seen as an ally and resource.

An entire society that appreciates cultures and beliefs that are not their own.

Shaping a future generation of critical thinkers

My success will not be to your detriment

100
Where we have overcorrected on clunky process because we thought we needed rules, we will right size

Education will again be a tool to social equity - a vehicle for thriving

Government helps me grow, not only when I 'fail'

Trust will be a dominant civic value and emotion


21st century skills like collaboration, critical thinking, digital literacy will be normative

Re-emergence of trust in public health and safety

Public service will be among the most desired professional tracks for every possible reason

Data governance and safety will be a gold standard in CA

100
Authentic communication between policymakers and people.

No stigma for people who need help 

Focus on acceptance as an appreciation rather than an agreement

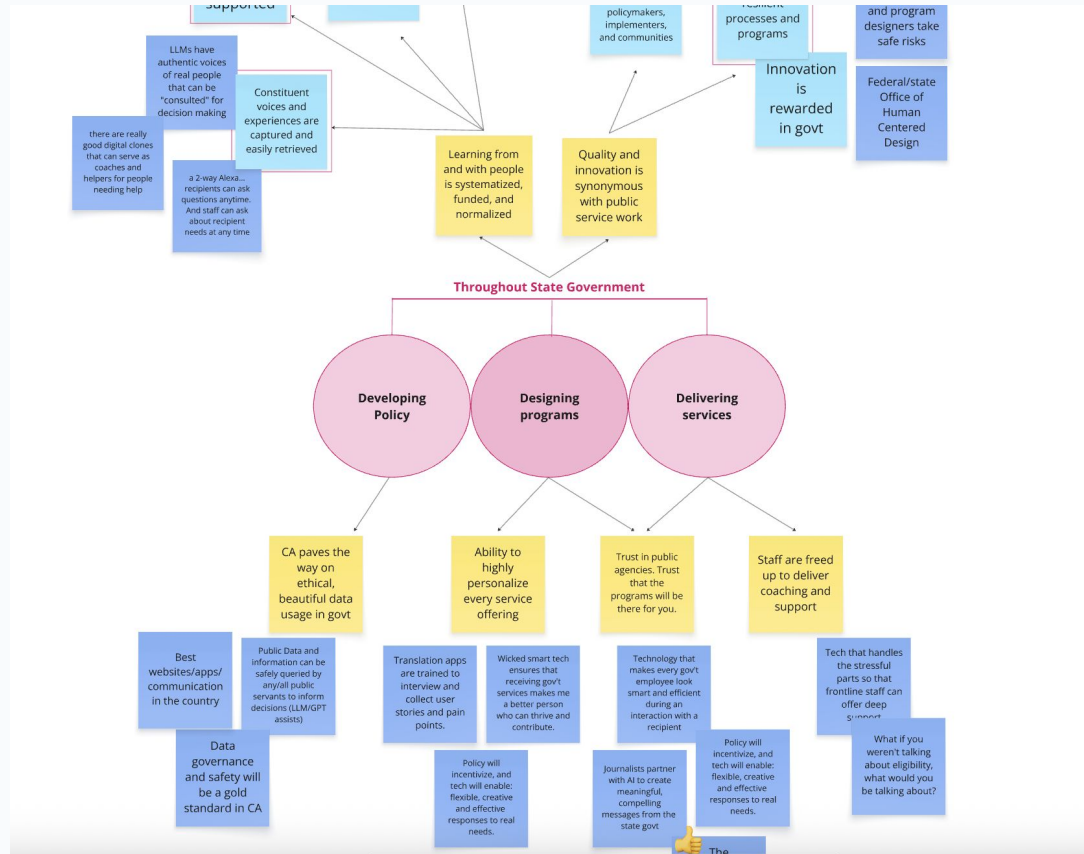
A trustworthy government with the resources to support citizens in need

AI tools will allow access to easily find govt services

UBI everywhere so that government services are more focused on what people really need



Synthesizing the future visions



Two hopeful, user-centered futures

1. Learning from and with people is normalized, systematized, funded:

- HCD is required and well-supported
- Constituent voices and experiences are captured and easily retrieved
- Co-design projects happen quickly and efficiently

2. Quality and innovation is synonymous with public service work:

- Government processes and programs are modern and resilient
- Deep relationships between policymakers, implementers, and communities

Step 2: Participatory Experiential Futures

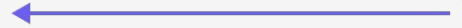




What Are Experiential Futures?

Experiential Futuring is a method that brings potential futures to life through immersive, tangible, and emotional experiences. Instead of merely talking about what could happen, we build spaces where people can step into the future.

Participants engage with scenarios using storytelling, role-play, artifacts, and other sensory elements. This approach helps people **imagine, feel, and understand** what different futures might be like, fostering deeper insights and inspiring bold ideas for change. By experiencing these possible futures firsthand, participants can better envision practical steps toward more customer-centered government services.



Translate principles into **depictions**
of that future.

Future Things workshops

Create a scene/experience/immersion that 15 workshop participants can walk into, **as themselves**. We want them to be part of it.

FUTURE 2 - PUBLIC SERVICE EXEMPLIFIES QUALITY AND INNOVATION

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select a breakout room
2. Get oriented to your future (5 min)
3. Begin brainstorming individually, quietly (10 min)
4. Share ideas, laugh, build on them, create new ideas (15 min)
5. Vote – just to prioritize the most interesting ones, but you can include others (5 min)
6. Summarize to share with the larger group (15 min)
7. Come back to the main area, listen and share (Final 10 minutes)

Two hopeful, user-centered futures

- 1. Learning from and with people is normalized, systematized, funded:**
 - HCD is required and well-supported
 - Constituent voices and experiences are captured and easily retrieved
 - Co-design projects happen quickly and efficiently
- 2. Quality and innovation is synonymous with public service work:**
 - Government processes and programs are modern and resilient
 - Deep relationships between policymakers, implementers, and communities

Advice

Be bold. This is not a time to think incrementally.

Be weird. We are trying to offer new perspectives that provoke thinking.

Be flexible. We are not proposing only one right answer, do your best, it's ok if it's not perfect.

Be curious. Be patient, trust the process. You won't know what the future looks like until the final exercise.

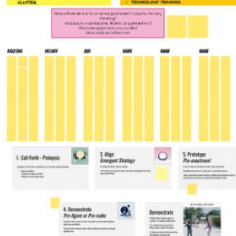
1. GET ORIENTED TO YOUR FUTURE

1. SAY HELLO TO EACH OTHER
2. READ THROUGH THE POST-IT NOTES ON THE PLED BOARD FOR YOUR GROUP (AND GLANCE AT THE OTHERS)
3. BEGIN QUESTIONS



2. BRAINSTORM SILENTLY ~ 10 MINUTES

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. WILDEST IMAGINE</p> <p>2. DO THINGS GO ANY FURTHER?</p> <p>3. DESCRIBING THE FUTURE AND IMAGINE</p> <p>4. WHAT YOU COULD REPRESENT THAT IDEA</p> <p>5. DO YOU BELIEVE</p> <p>6. WHAT PROMPT FROM THAT FUTURE</p> <p>7. COULD YOU IMPROVE?</p> <p>8. CAPTURE ONE FOR STORY OF YOUR OWN</p> | <p>IDEAS FOR TRAVELERS FUTURE</p> <p>1. A BOARDPLACE ADVERTISING</p> <p>2. A BOARD MEETING</p> <p>3. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> <p>4. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> <p>5. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> <p>6. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> <p>7. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> <p>8. A PUBLIC CELEBRATION</p> |
|---|---|



3. SHARE AND BUILD ON - 10 MINUTES

- | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|
| 1. STAND BACK AND BUILD. AT THE LITTLEST, AT THE BIGGEST, TALK AND LEARN, BUILD, DON'T CAPTIVATE, CAPTIVE FROM BEING | WE ARE GOING FOR PRODIGIOUS! CHOOSE THE BEST THAT ARE POSSIBLE & THE BEST LEAD TEAM, AND UNDERSTAND |
| 2. COPY SOME OF THE IDEAS FROM STEP 3. THAT YOU WANT TO BUILD ON | |
| 3. WRITE AN THE IMPORTANCE THAT WORTH PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE POSSIBLE TO WRITE PEOPLE INTO | |

- Having a shuttle system staffed by program participants that take customers to and from workforce development services.

Addressing
the critical
barrier of

Community-building. You are not alone.

People ride this bus to feel connected to other people.

What's we
love about
this future:

Quick, easy,
accessible.
Kind and
invigorating.

Deep connection between the driver and "tour guides" with the participants

people would have a richer experience of their benefits because guided self-

Experience
we would
build out:

Policymakers /decision-makers ride the bus!

Hire a bus and workshop participants hear stories from people on the bus.

Mobile RV has childcare so parents can fully participate and access

Questions remaining:

How might we incorporate childcare?

What is the right transit?

What are the best services to offer?

Example

HCD as a core competency of public sector leaders.

Bills have quotes from lived-experience experts to explain their purpose

California state employees win creativity awards over and over again

Future Things

Creepy idea:

*talking to a govt Alexa
and sharing what they
are struggling with; they
can access it any time*

Future Things

Creepy idea:

*talking to a govt Alexa
and sharing what they
are struggling with; they
can access it any time*

*Front line workers and
policy makers asking
questions to the
Lived-Experience-Alexa
throughout their
workday*

*A public servant can ask
"Alexa" what people in a
specific neighborhood
need related to a specific
topic*

*Policymakers reviewing
the data from what
recipients asked of their
Benefits Alexas*

A

Learning from and with
people is systematized,
funded, and normalized

HCD is
required
and well-
supported

Transparent
sample size,
demographics,
experiences need
to be captured

Highlight sources
and gaps --
"proceed with
caution, there is an
under-
representation of X
people"

Constituent
voices and
experiences are
captured and
easily retrieved

tech when it
streamlines, but
doesn't REMOVE
people from the
process

there are really
good digital clones
that can serve as
coaches and
helpers for people
needing help

LLMs have
authentic voices
of real people
that can be
"consulted" for
decision making

Fast and
equitable
co-design
projects

Smart tech
facilitated a process
for engaging
citizens in how
programs or
agencies are
measured

Offloading to
AI our least-
enjoyed tasks:
cleaning and
coding

Tech that
systematizes
best practices
for co-creation
processes

Tech enable location-
specific, lived
experience consultants
to be engaged in co-
design and
compensated fairly for
their time.

Recipients sign on
to become paid
consultants on a
regular basis.
creates cohort of
real live resources

No digital
divide for
participation

highly accurate
and accessible
screeners that
are tech
facilitated

2-way is VERY
important.
Listening and
responding

Citizens have
a say in how
we set metrics
and KPIs

a 2-way Alexa...
recipients can ask
questions anytime.
And staff can ask
about recipient
needs at any time

In law or official policy,
there are required
expectations for
consultation AND
budget, training,
resources to do this.

Innovation, HCD,
and dreaming are
valued parts of govt
programming and
policy-making

Equitable
remunerati
on/compen
sation

Sacred in-
person,
relational
experiences

Easy access to
participation,
regardless of tech
or not. Facilitated
use of tech to
participate

qualitative data
coding "Tell me
what we've
heard in the
last 5 years"

voice
access is
more
accessible!

tech can
help with
language
access!

Kids learn
HCD in
schools, as a
core
competency.

HCD as a core
competency
of public
sector leaders.

Daring to dream
becomes a
common practice
and is celebrated.

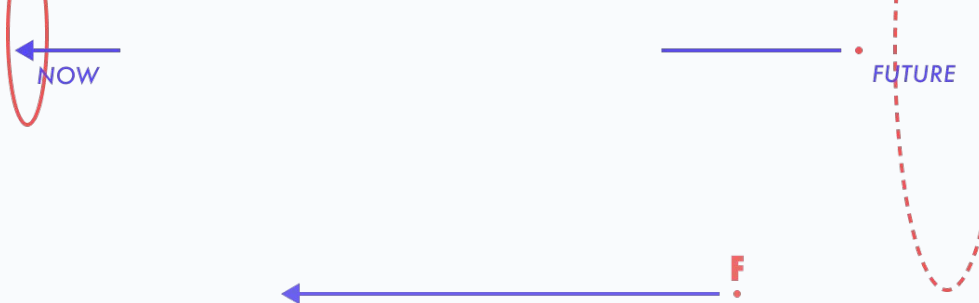
We think more
about
compensating for
design work, the
humans impacted
by policies and
implementations

Not just taught, but
implemented--
many tangible
results of how
powerful it is to
include user voices.

At the core,
it is about
other
humans.

Centering on
humans and
dreaming is
rewarded,
acknowledged





Script-writing

- Turn aspirational visions into scenes from everyday life
- People must be able to step into them AS THEMSELVES and participate
 - Why are they gathered?
 - What are they doing?
 - How to make it fun and informative?

Co-design with lived experience



Future #1: AI for client voices

Future #1 - Benni, the IntellAgent voice of recipients



One day in a California Department of Social Services meeting room, a meeting begins



Then Benni, the Benefits IntellAgent, speaks up. "Excuse me, I'd like to add to this conversation. I have stories, data, and insights from interviews with current recipients to share..."



Now, our question for you is... what does Benni look, feel, and sound like? How would you like an IntellAgent to represent your stories in California government benefits meetings?

Benni represents your voices




Imagine that any technology is possible for Benni to represent your stories and your needs in decision-making meetings...







- What are all the ways your voice could be represented?
 - Augmented reality right there on the table. Recreate that citizen's story for everyone to hear. Speaking specifically to how the policies and decisions are going to address the challenges this person will face.
 - **Represent them IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT** – kids running around, sounds and smells. (hologram recreation)
 - This person, their voice, telling their story.
 - **Intelligence – Benni can ask it's own questions.** Removing barriers from recipients being in that space– the policy talk that is too boring/complicated to listen to.
 - We've never been represented without technology– how to represent us? We would be even further disconnected. **The govt doesn't want to hear our voices. Why listen to a robot of our voices?**
 - Collecting these voices and stories has benefits. Love the potential of statistics, comparisons, things to do with the data.
 - I anticipate that people in the meeting will be against it, "How do we trust it?" "This is just data" – **plopping this tech into a meeting isn't going to change mindsets**– needs mindset change around it too.
 - Having people's voices, especially underprivileged, is important. 2025 and physical paperwork – **doesn't know my story. I'm a number to them.** Foster care govt data.
 - Complexity


Future #2: Co-design Innovation Awards



Co-design Awards

 Celebrating Co-De  

Published 

Questions **Responses 6** Settings

What kind of improvements would get awarded?

6 responses

People feel heard, valued, and respected. Communities are thriving and motivated by the sense that they are heard and there's a strong indication of responsiveness.


Systemic Changes or Reform, Power Sharing, Acknowledging Injustices and Correcting them, public servants who value community in an intentional way

Education Champions, Health Innovators, Accessible Resource Contributors, Community Organizers, Unifying Politicians Award, Bridging the Gap awards

Impactful shared leadership models

Ones that make change and offer solutions or make the most impact

positive input, value for lived experience, sharing stories, ideas and solutions for growth





Artifacts

- To immerse people in the future, we need props, scenery, actors, and costumes!
- “Diegetic” – true to the time, to convince that this future is happening.

User testing with our friends



User testing with our friends





Refining

- Then it was time to build the real thing
- And take it on the road to 5 different counties in California



CALIFORNIA CO-DESIGN PRINCIPLES



SHARE POWER

When differences in power are unacknowledged and unaddressed, the people with the most power have the most influence over decisions. To change that, we must share power in research, decision-making, design, delivery and evaluation. Without this, there is no co-design.



USE PARTICIPATORY MEANS

Co-design provides many ways for people to take part and express themselves. Participatory approaches aren't about relaying information; they're about facilitating self-discovery and moving people from participants to active partners.



PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS

Co-design isn't possible without relationships, social connection and trust among co-designers, funders and organizers of co-design.



BUILD CAPABILITY

People require support and encouragement to adopt new ways of being and doing, learn from others, and have their voices heard. To support that, designers can move from 'expert' to coach. In co-design, everyone has something to teach and something to learn.



PREPARED BY THE FLOCK PROJECT

California's statewide research team dedicated to delivering effective programs and solving system-level challenges through co-design.

MEET BENNI

Benni is a new artificial intelligence that focuses on integrating lived experience in the decision-making process. Benni brings personal, authentic stories from real people into government processes.



DATA SOURCES

Benni draws from research conducted by the Flock with diverse voices across communities and makes that research available on-demand for meaningful insights.



VALIDATION

As a new technology, Benni validates data by comparing sources in real-time, ensuring that even the most critical and marginalized voices are heard when asked a question.



INTERACTION

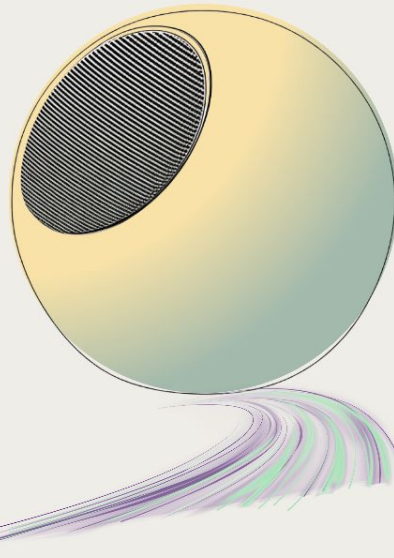
Benni works with all levels of government, including practitioners, policymakers, lived experience councils, case managers, program directors, and beyond.



RESEARCH

Benni incorporates ethics around privacy and responsible AI to ensure safety, mindfulness, and ease when sharing participant stories.

HI, I'M BENNI! YOUR TRUSTED RESEARCH ADVISOR WHO SHARES REAL STORIES FROM REAL PEOPLE. ASK ME ANYTHING!















Discussion





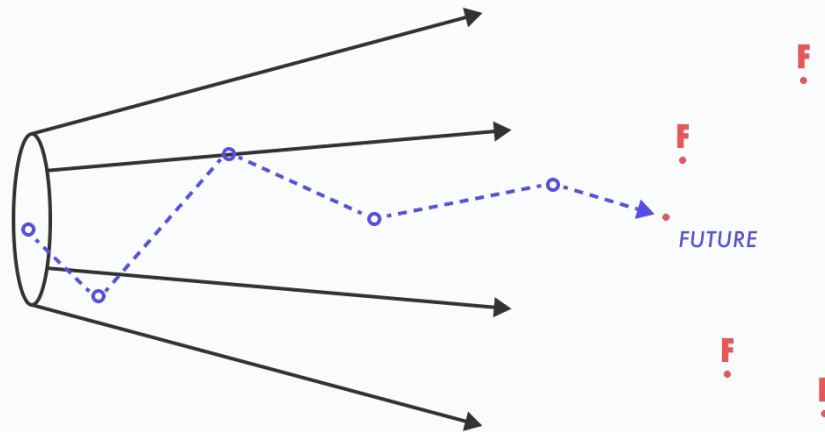
What's next?

- Turn to a partner
 - How do you use visioning and long-term thinking today?
 - How could you do more of it?
 - What visions would you start with?

Design Futures



Read more about our project here!



CivicMakers.com → Our Work
JustVisions.co → Learning