



Foresight & Innovation Beehive

December 2-4, 2024

Nairobi, Kenya



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Introduction

In December 2024, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors held the third Foresight and Innovation Beehive in Nairobi, bringing together members of the Foresight & Futures Community of Practice and global partners. This remarkable gathering marked the first birthday of the initiative and an important milestone in the community's applied learning journey.

Our objectives included:

- Expanding our horizons and foresight toolboxes by experimenting with different, especially non-Western, approaches and frameworks;
- Creating scaffolding for work on capabilities, processes, and organizational design;
- Strengthening our community as a source of mutual support, solidarity and peer learning; and
- Understand how we can create space for thinking about the future, not just for our organizations but within our larger ecosystems and, most importantly, the communities we serve.

The Nairobi Beehive was spread over three days and divided into various interactive workshops. Due to the interconnectedness of philanthropic practice, several themes and topics emerged: climate change; how to adapt, use or handle AI; global demographic shifts and their implications for the future political landscape; how organizations can be responsive without being reactionary.

Building on our successful gatherings in Turin, Italy and the Pocantico Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in New York, this meeting aimed to answer the “so what?” and the “now what?” What do our learnings mean for our work, for our organizations, for operating in this changing landscape, for how we can carry forward our collective futures? How do we start the difficult work of operationalizing this knowledge, championing it and bringing others on board?

We didn't simply ask these questions, we began answering them with the help of the power and wisdom of our community through peer learning. We also heard from our ecosystem partners about how they leverage foresight, futures and imagination in fields that move along different timelines, whether it's global governance, community liberation or public policy. Storytelling was another crucial through thread. Through oral, immersive, visual and experiential storytelling, we wove together visions of different worlds, different communities, different organizations. This helped us build stronger foresight muscles and fortify empathy, but also to imagine not what is probable, not what will be, but what *could* and *should* be.

Welcome Dinner

The day before the official start of the workshop, participants were introduced to Nairobi at an intimate dinner at Cultiva, an eco-friendly, farm-to-table restaurant located in a quiet suburb. Cultiva's commitment to sustainability - from sourcing local, seasonal ingredients to supporting local entrepreneurs - was the perfect space for participants to start thinking about futurism and community.

Day One

At the opening of the first day, participants were treated to a welcome lunch at the Next Step Foundation's offices. Before settling into a gorgeous spread of local food, participants were led into an icebreaker: please tell us your superpower! The lighthearted exercise, carried out with much laughter, applause and sounds of affirmation, revealed the diversity of personalities at the workshop, giving everyone insight into the community. Some of the answers:



After the icebreaker, we were officially welcomed by Peres Were, Executive Director of the Next Step Foundation (NSF), which would be graciously hosting the Beehive for the duration of the workshop. Peres kicked things off for the participants by giving an overview of the NSF work and explaining how they utilized Artificial Intelligence to create a mental health chatbot, and another one to guide their clients by aggregating their interests and skills and giving suggestions for possible future careers. Next Step, which works to ensure that people with disabilities receive the wholistic support necessary to thrive, also found an innovative use for AI, by using it to artificially “age” their clients and then helping them write letters from their future selves. These words were echoed by Christopher Harrison, the Executive Chairman of the foundations board of directors, and board member Lillian Wambui Chege.

Evans Okinyi, the CEO of the other co-host, The East Africa Philanthropy Network (EAPN), also welcomed all the local and international participants, and gave an overview of the EAPN, a regional network of over 100 organizations which connects philanthropy to the private sector and governments in the East Africa region.

Olga Tarasov, RPA’s Vice President of Insights & Inquiry welcomed all the participants framed the goals and overall arc of not only this convening but the initiative as a whole, and provided a detailed overview of the agenda.

Participants settled in and, after everyone had a copy of their workbook, it was time for the first two sessions, each of which built on the last, and acted as brief refreshers about futures work, terminologies, methodologies, and previous workshops.

Each participant had a workbook in which to note their reflections, efforts and discoveries throughout the workshop, and to use for post-event contemplation, as well as for sharing with colleagues inside their organizations and networks.

Learnings from Turin: Interactive Review

The inaugural Foresight & Futures Initiative Beehive took place in Turin in January 2024 where participants delved into “signals of change,” trends, mega trends and developing future scenarios.

Led by Anders Folmer Buhelt, participants were encouraged to continue on the journey that kicked off in Turin, then Pocantico and had now led to Nairobi. How could they continue with this idea and what could they learn from a non-Western perspective?

One of the learning objectives of the session was to “Practice social imagination skills.” Letting their imaginations go wild (grounded in present realities, of course) helps plant intellectual seeds now for any change they’d like to see. Guided by a series of illustrations and graphics about climate change, democracy, social equity and more participants were asked to come up with scenarios for earth’s future.

One scenario emerged prominently based on parameters related to technology, globalization, and democracy. **The year is 2090.** The world has new cultures, new languages. Gender means something different in this world. Previously oppressed communities now dominate and comprise the global majority, and power is no longer in the hands of the few. People have organized themselves into small self-sufficient communities. In a geopolitical shift, power now resides in Asia and Africa. Traditional knowledge systems may have made a comeback and AI has flattened careers. People now prefer barter over traditional trade, so money has little or no value. Societies are more focused on meritocracies and very few people inherit money since it's scarce or of little value. All members of society would contribute to the overall good, so everyone's skills and contributions would be valuable.

This session set the scene for a natural transition to reviewing the work from our second Beehive at the Pocantico Center in Tarrytown, New York.

Signals of Change and Applying Learnings

This review of the Pocantico Beehive sought to refresh people's familiarity with different foresight and futures methodologies and approaches that the participants had learnt to date; deepen understanding of the signals of change; and gain insight into how community members apply learning to their individual and organizational work.

It was also a great time to go over some of the terminology commonly used in futures work:

Anticipatory Risk: Identifying and assessing potential risks before they manifest, allowing organizations to proactively prepare and mitigate threats.

Signals of Change: This involves tracking subtle, early indicators of change, known as "signals," which may suggest emerging trends or shifts. Identifying and analyzing these signals can help organizations better adapt to future development and position themselves ahead of significant transformations.

Backcasting: A technique that starts with envisioning a desired future outcome and works backward to outline the steps required to reach it. Backcasting encourages goal-driven planning, enabling organizations to strategically map actions needed to achieve their long-term vision.

Immersive Futuring/Storytelling: Experiential. Places people in realistic scenarios set in potential future environments, helping them feel and understand what those futures might be like. Immersive futuring fosters deeper insights and empathy and inspires action toward preferred futures.

Dinner and Fireside Chat

Later that evening, Dr. Katindi Sivi of LongView Consult and a partner of the Foresight & Futures Initiative moderated a fireside chat with Kenyan Senator Olekina Ledama and Brenda Ogembo, a Principal Clerk Assistant and the Deputy Head of the Senate Liaison Office at the Parliament of Kenya. Senator Ledama founded the bi-partisan Futures Caucus in the Senate, the first of its kind in the country's history. One of Brenda Ogembo's key responsibilities is to find creative ways to transform senators' ideals and policies and craft them into actionable legislation.



Katindi has interacted with both of them, having conducted foresight, foresight methodologies and anticipatory governance innovation training for Senate Liaison Officers who work with the Senate Futures Caucus. The fireside chat provided a fascinating "behind the scenes" view about how Futures Caucus proposals get turned from ideas into draft legislation, and how the world of the imagination that is useful in "Immersive futuring and storytelling" is tempered by the logistics of the legislative drafting process.

Immersive storytelling really came to life with the next day's speaker, Abubaker Zein.

The Power of Storytelling: Exploring and Learning from African Indigenous Knowledge



Zein, a governance expert and storyteller, was introduced by Katindi Sivi and proceeded to walk everyone through the possibilities that good narratives could open up. Zein has a background in artistry, activism, and analysis and has facilitated intellectual work for civic, community and academic institutions, and served as a Commissioner at the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission.

He handed out “kangas,” brightly colored cloth that originated on the East African coast that is mainly worn by women. Kangas always have sayings,

proverbs or riddles. He introduced the gathering to the concept of “orature,” a word coined by Ugandan Pio Zirimu and expanded on by later generations of African writers, performance artists and storytellers. “Orature” captures the African approach to oral literature, which combines songs, gestures, dances, a communal “call and response” aspect, and audience participation. Orature is literature, folktales, morality AND community knowledge as *performance*. In fact, in Kiswahili, there is a formula for how stories begin: the storyteller says, “paukwa,” and the audience responds, “pakawa.” It signals a communal commitment to listen to and participate in a story.

What part could storytelling or orature possibly play in futurism for non-African groups? He told us about Prof Micere Mugo, an early practitioner of orature, who decided to teach Kiswahili to inmates in a US prison. Why Kiswahili? “The foreignness of the language turned it into a language of imagination. The unfamiliar can be a vehicle of revelation.” An African approach can help non-Africans negotiate new and old realities from new perspectives.

So he told a story about a very small, very peaceful tribe called the Munyo Yaya that lives along Kenya's Tana River, which is notoriously rife with crocodiles. Local lore has it that the Munyo Yaya - “the crocodile whisperers” - are never attacked by the ferocious river dwellers because they have learned how to co-exist. With a deep knowledge of their surroundings, what the Munyo Yaya did was a form of backcasting: they imagined a future where they could co-exist with the crocodiles and then found a way of making that possible. Their totem is the tortoise, which retreats when it's in danger. They adapted this by observing the crocodile behavior and tailored their responses accordingly. Neighboring tribes have been heard to comment that they can't enter the rivers like the Munyo Yaya “because the crocodiles don't know us how they know the Munyo Yaya.” Their story also illustrated an important point: foresight is meaningless without context.

Zein then gave participants more things to think about, for instance, how the Maasai community from Kenya and Tanzania, have a scheduled leadership handover ceremony whenever different age groups get older and move up in the community hierarchy. The older, ruling age group officially hands over power and retires, but are available for advice. Would that be something worth considering in people's organizations? What would an official built-in succession plan look like? The Maasai rule themselves by consensus, so would this kind of succession planning even work at organizations where negotiations and edicts take place at the top and the people at the bottom are “implementation partners?”

Community-Building: a Source of Resilience, Solidary and Action

During lunch, the community was led in a conversation with Donita Volkwijn' about how the work we've explored can apply to and be strengthened by effective community-building. She challenged us to consider how we define community. Is it something you're born into and have no control over? Can you intentionally join and/or create a community? She also challenged participants to think about how community is necessary for futurism and overall resilience of our work.

Risk Anticipation in a Changing Global Landscape



Themes of community came into sharper focus at the following session. Aarathi Krishnan of the RAKSHA Intelligences Futures led us in asking, “Now what? Risk anticipation in a changing global landscape.” Risk Anticipation and Foresight is an emerging field that looks beyond current risk indicators, to understanding the broader global intelligence, political, economic, and social futures and stressors that might tip a country into crisis.

These capabilities are particularly important at a time where multiple countries are facing concurrent and emerging risks from **debt default, to heat inequality, agricultural vulnerability, to soaring cost of living crisis.**

Aarathi took us through Risk Anticipation and Intelligence Futures, and how to apply them to real-life scenarios. she pointed out that 2024 was a pivotal year for numerous countries, with about half of the world's countries holding elections. Notable trends include: growing anti-incumbent sentiment, increasing polarization and a significant rise in authoritarianism.

What do these mean for philanthropy? How would these developments affect strategies and why is risk anticipation important in helping us understand people's vulnerabilities? One of the critical takeaways was that observing global trends can help organizations, including those in the philanthropy ecosystem, mitigate risk and proactively adapt their approaches.

Operating Archetypes as a Framework for Institutionalizing Foresight and Futures

In 2022, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, along with members of the Theory of the Foundation Learning Collaborative and dozens of funders and thought partners around the world, developed and published Operating Archetypes. This instrument was designed to provide organizations seeking to optimize their operations and impact with an analytical framework, a mirror that serves as a tool for action and alignment.

Based on extensive multi-country research, they identified eight distinct operating archetypes:

1. **Talent Agency**
2. **Think Tank**
3. **Campaign Manager**



4. **Field Builder**
5. **Venture Catalyst**
6. **Designer**
7. **Underwriter**
8. **Sower**

Suozzi, Chege and Tarasov laid out how each Operating Archetype is defined by several core attributes, including:

1. **Reason/Value Proposition.** What do you do and why?
2. **Resources/Lead with.** What is the primary asset - financial or non-financial - used to fulfill the mission
3. **Key capabilities/Skills.** What are your top skill,s areas of expertise or capabilities?
4. **Equity.** How do you include the voices most affected and share power to advance equity?
5. **Response/Activities.** What do you do to takle the problem and/or advance a solution?
6. **Primary Audience.** For who do you do it?
7. **Community Served (if different from primary audience).** For who do you do it?
8. **Relationships/Alliances.** With whom do you do it?
9. **Impact Assessment.** Where do you look for results?

These archetypes, while not rigid, are useful tools of looking at individual foundations and organizations and they raise some interesting ways of thinking about them. For instance, do you hire for what leadership thinks the organization is or for what it actually is and does? We should also keep in mind that organizations can change archetypes at any time in their history.

The participants broke off into groups to discuss which archetype would best describe their respective organizations. When they regrouped, the resulting conversation was spirited; the archetypes obviously struck a chord and the conversation turned into a freewheeling discussion that raised lots of concerns, ideas and insights. The groups examined their organizations and their grantees as well as their histories and had several observations and comments.



One participant said she'd gotten a lightbulb moment when she realized that the program she runs is a "Sower" archetype whereas the larger foundation was decidedly not. It helped her understand the program's place in the foundation. Others had come to similar realizations: their foundations and organization were hybrids: what did that mean for the futures of the organizations, did it create challenges, opportunities, tensions?

Another participant said that the exercise - coupled with other preceding sessions - had made her think about creating a “Seed Bank,” especially for those in any positions of authority. Her idea was to say, “20 or 30 years from now, what would we want our staff to start thinking about/doing that we’re not doing now? How do we “seed” existing programs?”

The conversation turned to what we could learn from other cultures. Would non-Western foresight methods be helpful here, something like the crocodile whisperers? Another participant, agreeing that different cultural approaches would be helpful, wondered if this was a good time to discuss embedding the Maasai approach to succession. As interesting as the concept was, stepping aside based on age wouldn’t work at any organization, but the idea of a formalized handing over time was intriguing and perhaps worth looking into and developing further.

The general consensus was that the Operating Archetypes were immensely useful and worth developing even more.

What’s Next?

Following the Nairobi Beehive, we have seen existential crises unfold, bringing into greater focus the importance of foresight and futures thinking and our community’s work. So, what’s next for these initiatives, and how will we meet the moment? The Futures & Foresight Working Group will continue to build on this momentum, deepening its collaboration with the UN Futures Lab and exploring practical applications of foresight methodologies. Moving forward, we will also establish peer learning groups to facilitate knowledge-sharing, strengthen collective problem-solving, and ensure that insights from diverse perspectives inform our approach. Through these efforts, we aim to enhance our capacity to anticipate and respond to emerging challenges, ensuring philanthropy plays a proactive role in shaping a more just and sustainable future.

