

**EES Conference Outreach
May 15, 2024**

1. For the Abstract (excerpt from the Call for Offers)

Course title

Applying Foresight Thinking and Methods to Evaluation

Facilitators, Names, and affiliations

Annette L Gardner, PhD, Principal, ALGardner Consulting
Kathleen M. Sullivan, JD, Principal, Fine Gauge Strategy, LLC

Target Level (Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced)

Intermediate

Prerequisites for participants; All proposals for the intermediate and advanced courses must list necessary prerequisites. If not, please say so.

No prior experience with foresight or futures is necessary. Because we will discuss ways that foresight can be embedded in evaluation design, participants will need some training in evaluation, e.g., evaluation questions, design, process, Theory of Change, etc.

Minimum and maximum number of participants

5 students minimum; 40 students maximum

Summarized Workshop Content

The past few years have demonstrated that our economy, climate, politics, and social order can change much faster than in past decades. Our present, and certainly our future, will continue to be volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). For our evaluation clients, it is no longer enough to reflect on the past and the present in program development. Evaluators must actively anticipate what may happen in the future and feed that information back into decision-making and evaluation planning. “Foresight” or the ability to use “futures” methods to inform strategy and decision-making, provides a rigorous and proven set of tools to perceive, make sense of, and act upon ideas about the future. It is a capacity that frees evaluators from the constraints of linear thinking and enables them to work with novelty, complexity, and uncertainty, increasing the resiliency of their evaluation plans and recommendations.

In this workshop, co-facilitators with expertise in foresight will use a three-part format that is a combination of lecture and group exercises. In Part 1, participants will learn foresight fundamentals. Using a lecture and question/answer approach, we will lay the foundation for using foresight methods, including an explanation of what foresight is and key methods. We will make the case for strengthening evaluator foresight in the face of great change and demonstrate the fit of foresight with evaluation and how it supports strategy and evaluation to support transformational change. In Part 2, facilitators will demonstrate the use of the Futures Wheel to systematically explore the implications of factors that shape a program or policy. This exercise will deepen participant understanding of trends and their impacts. It will also provide a tool that evaluators can use with stakeholders to develop a Theory of Change and to fine-tune data gathering and analysis. In Part 3, facilitators will demonstrate how to use Wind Tunneling using alternative scenarios of the year 2040 to test the fit and robustness of evaluation recommendations. We will use an immersive, “day in the life” approach whereby participants step into the scenario and use the different portrayals of what life in 2040 could look like to consider whether a specific evaluation recommendation will hold up under the scenario. Participants will then answer questions about strengthening the robustness of recommendation. To demonstrate the application of foresight tools, we will use the case of an evaluation of a program to build community gardens in urban areas.

Throughout the Workshop we will map the two foresight methods--Futures Wheel and Wind Tunneling--on to a typical evaluation design and discuss how these tools can bolster the development and testing common facets of an evaluation, such as Theory of Change, data collection, and evaluation reporting. Additionally, we will describe actual evaluation cases where foresight methods have been included in the evaluation plan, providing practical advice for including and working with foresight methods.

Handout Materials. Where relevant, description of the materials participants will receive prior to or during the course; explain when they will be disseminated.

Participants will receive recommended readings on foresight prior to and after the course, including information about the two tools that will be demonstrated in the workshop (Futures Wheel and Alternative Scenarios / Wind Tunneling). During the course, they will receive copies of the alternative scenarios which will be used in the Wind Tunnelling exercise. Our experience from past workshops is that it is very helpful to send out materials after the session, reinforcing what was covered in the workshop.