

How to Begin Thinking Long and Short

A core strategy for building organizational resiliency, as we assert in the article “[To Combat Adversity, Resilient Nonprofits Think Long and Short](#),” is to think long-term as well as short-term. That is, nonprofits surface and align around a 10-year vision—a purpose-driven ambition that is big enough and bold enough to push team members to look beyond the realm of what is possible today. At the same time, they home in on 12- to 18-month goals that will take them another step closer to realizing the changes they seek in the world.

Thinking both long and short can be powerful, whether your organization is confronting a crisis, significant volatility, or just everyday uncertainty. If you want to start, consider the power of intentional discussion. Gather your senior team and commit to having a series of conversations focused on your organization’s overriding destination. Try to schedule at least 60 to 90 minutes, and resist letting day-to-day business tasks crowd out this important conversation.

Here are some questions to get your team started. Share them in advance so that team members have time to reflect:

Our long-term vision for impact:

In 10 years, what would our clients or our community—with its myriad members and stakeholders—look like if they were truly healthy and thriving?

If our vision for our community came true, *but for* our organization, what would have happened? What is the unique, critical role we can play in realizing that future?

Our short-term vision for impact: If we are on a journey toward that future...

What part of our core work should grow?

What might need to evolve or change?

What new areas of work should we pursue?

What might we need to stop doing, even if it feels hard or scary?

Sample Q&A for Thinking Long and Short

Here's how one workforce development organization thought about its **10-year vision**:

In 10 years, what would it look like if our clients were truly healthy and thriving?

- Our clients—and especially our Black and Latinx clients—are in stable, life-sustaining jobs. All major employers in our region have implemented new policies (including health and benefit packages) to support entry-level workers.

If our vision for our community came true, but for our organization, what would have happened? What is the unique, critical role we can play in realizing that future?

- We are a one-stop shop for clients to receive high-quality, compassionate training for living-wage jobs, in addition to relevant wrap-around supports (e.g., referrals for housing assistance; social services). We are the local, go-to trusted source for employers who are looking for workforce pipelines and technical assistance related to how to support and retain these employees.

Here is how the same organization synthesized the discussion of key questions about its **18-month destination**:

If we are on a journey toward that future...

What part of our core work should we continue to grow?

- Maintain strong relationships with our employer partners
- Grow our advocacy for workplace practices and policies that specifically benefit people of color
- Advance our partnerships with employers in stable and growing industries

What are we doing today that we should evolve?

- Pivot our skills training to focus on growing industries; continue to shift to an online delivery model
- Add mental health supports to our training

What new areas of work should we pursue?

- Basic financial coaching for clients and financial assistance referral partnerships, to help our clients access financial assistance resources and improve their financial literacy