

Forecasting the Future—reality, conjecture, or predictions

Whether Or Not We Are Ready—The Weather Always Is

By Rhea Blanken, FASAE, Results Technology, Bethesda MD.

Susanne Bowman, The Haefler Group, Reston VA.

"Your view of the future shapes your actions today, and your actions today shape your future."

—Daniel Burrus, futurist

Article based on research funded by ASAE Foundation—our white paper focuses on the “Six Realities Existing Within Converging Trends” focusing on the importance for dialogue when designing the future.

Background Philosophy

If it's raining, we will get wet unless certain precautions are taken. No sunscreen applied – you risk getting skin cancer. Bottom line, you should be prepared for the weather whatever the forecast. You must be flexible enough to respond to its immediate impact on your plans.

Today's weather forecasting is much more sophisticated than even a decade ago. Modeling, algorithms, and constant input of new data has added to the accuracy of meteorology predications. We now expect weather forecasting to be reliable. Our being prepared is expected, while being uninformed or unprepared is unwise and can be dangerous.

Just as the weather is constantly changing, so is the environment in which our organizations operate. In the association community, our “weather forecasting” looks like strategic planning. As staff and volunteer leaders, we practice being response-able to change (able to respond in the immediate and even moments prior). Our environment challenges us to be flex-able (able to shift actions and resources on a dime).

How does one practice being response-able for our association's weather? First, by determining the most appropriate vantage point. Determine if your best vantage point is local, regional, national or global weather. Next, use lessons from past experiences, current conditions, short range forecasts and long range outlooks as your radar screen to see what you need to see.

Then, select measurements for collecting and tracking data to determine how our judgments will be influenced. With weather, mostly we track temperature and precipitation. But as the total picture evolves, forecasting models can include high or low pressure systems, wind speeds, humidity and barometric pressure. Each of these measures evokes a new possibility. Are we prepared and ready or know what to do to be ready to enhance or thwart their impact on us?

What are our organization's measurements? Certainly we track budget and number of members and numerous other data points. But are we looking for evidence of future engagement trends? Do we take on those same practices and protocols when interacting with business, economic or educational forecasts? Too often, we appear surprised and may wonder what to do.

As weather has many forces and subtleties, so do organizational, business and cultural strategic planning efforts. Recent ASAE Foundation funded research addressed six specific realities as impacting and influencing for-profit businesses and associations alike. We propose exploring your readiness to include the *6 Realities* in your day-to-day planning just as you would prepare for any advancing weather system. We are concerned that if staff and volunteer leaders fail to focus and incorporate them into planning and analysis conversations, your future successes could be in jeopardy.

Now What

The ongoing assignment —determining how the 6 *Realities* impacts and influences associations and how we will make intelligent adjustments going forward. We suggest assembling the *Realities* into a visual display, a mobile, reflecting the priority level their impact has on your association’s future plans. Hint: a mobile models *balance* and *motion*—both are desirable capacities for associations. The following ideas can assist your leadership in their forecasting activities.

<p>#1 LABOR MARKET & ECONOMIC IMPACTS The changing labor market and economy will continue to impact associations. Shifts in individual members’ economic behavior are affecting joining, renewing, and participating rates.</p> <p>The target membership market (ages 25-54) is trending smaller, which directly impacts associations’ potential membership and participation.</p>	<p>Consider: Individual engagement has two components—commitment (psychological) and participation (behavioral). A behavioral measure of “most interest “ is the actual members participation attending specific meetings and events plus other active involvement examples. Which of your association’s offerings give members the chance to show commitment and participate in spite of economics?</p> <p>> According to <i>Human Economic Behavior</i>, there is an assumption that people make active decisions. Faced with a set of options, people always actively choose the one they like most. Behavior economists have found people frequently passively accept whatever happens if they do nothing. What ways could your association use this behavioral inclination to its advantage?</p>
<p>#2 BLURRED SECTOR BOUNDARIES Boundaries are blurring between non-profit and for-profit activism. The cause-related, altruistic attitude once a main frame for non-profits, has been expanded and amplified by many national and international corporations promoting a better civil society. Their websites, marketing and advertising, and their storefront displays loudly proclaim their positions.</p> <p>Current <i>Corporate Responsibility</i> programs are embedded in corporate profit/loss statements. This boundary-blurring creates opportunities for collaboration between business, government, and nonprofits to model innovation and share lessons learned to provide mission-driven services.</p>	<p>Consider: For-profit firms have formed cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations and local government to provide education and community services. What partnerships could your association form?</p> <p>> A Low-Profit Limited Liability Company (L3C) is a for-profit, social enterprise venture with a goal of performing a socially beneficial purpose, not maximizing income. It’s a hybrid structure combining the legal and tax flexibility of a traditional LLC, the social benefits of a nonprofit organization, and the branding/market advantages of a social enterprise. Millennials eagerly engage with L3Cs. How can your group use this model?</p>
<p>#3 IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS Demographic shifts continue to define and shape member engagement. Many associations are composed of older volunteers and staff holding leadership positions and younger members and staff in subordinate roles. There is a growing need to share leadership across generations, modeling commitment to the organization’s sustainability. Strategically, organizations must initialize, enhance and escalate collaboration between generations.</p>	<p>Consider: The term “membership” is not Millennial terminology. Associations should initiate, enhance and escalate member-relationships without over using this term. Millennial are more diverse than any preceding generation. Research says they are skeptical of institutions and more likely to start their own community-based organization rather than seeking out an existing institution. What does your membership age group’s profile say about your future growth opportunities? What will attract Millennials to you?</p>
<p>#4 TECHNOLOGY & CO-CREATION Advances in technology enable <i>active co-creation</i>.</p>	<p>Consider: Millennial staff and volunteers want to be on the inside, co-creating what the organization is doing. How is your association’s senior leaders</p>

<p>new ways of connecting and communicating, demanding ever-expanding openness and transparency. Today’s social media culture insists upon authenticity not overly hyped marketing messages. Younger members especially want to hear real stories from actual participants looking and sounding like them. They want to co-create value correlated and interrelated to their needs.</p>	<p>working with younger staff to have that happen? How are your members being encouraged to volunteer and welcomed as “value co-creators”?</p>
<p>#5 NETWORKS Networks continually drive work organized in new ways into new relationships. With the advent of new technologies, new norms for working collaboratively are surfacing, advancing their value and use. These networks are not limited by geographical or language boundaries. Formal volunteer or staff working-groups are no longer the only way to get things done. Standing Committees are giving way to virtual “adhocracies” and self-forming volunteer groups are creating original knowledge and problem solving without staff.</p>	<p>Consider: It’s been said that often that fewer rules are better than more, that open flow is better than closed. If volunteer and staff self-forming groups are expected to increase not decrease, what is your association’s approach to working with and encouraging volunteerism and engagement?</p>
<p>#6 VOLUNTEERISM-CIVIC ENGAGEMENT Interest in civic engagement rises where and when what matters is clearly evident, with people believing their engagement makes a difference. With the rise in direct engagement opportunities through online activism, networks, and virtual volunteering, this reality combines the power of technology, the growth of networks, and the engagement attitudes reflected by millennials.</p>	<p>Consider: How can your staff and volunteer leaders “plant seeds” to support the germination of those exciting ideas and undertakings coming from your members? How does staff “encourage” and support “co-creation” together and individually?</p>

More to Consider

- How are short and long range forecasting built into your planning, delivering, and refining memorable membership experiences?
- How does your association secure reliable forecasts and transfere their core knowledge?
- How are your organizational results measured and analyzed to maxamize lessons lerned?

Rhea is a Strategist Facilitator, Executive Coach, Creative Solution Generator, and Speaker Using "inside the box" resources to deliver "outside the box" strategic results
Creating *Recreational Learning Experiences* for association staff and volunteers
Contact her at rheaz@resultstech.com or 301-320-8711

Sue is a Membership Expert — Her work with association staff and volunteers puts the "Spotlight on Value". Her firm, The Haefer Group, Ltd., provides customized solutions based on data-driven analysis. Contact her at sbowman@thehaefergroup.com or 703-620-9315.