CREATING THE FUTURE
Change the Questions, Change the World!

Catalytic Thinking is a framework that creates a walkable path to the future we want, via the questions we ask. The following compares Catalytic Thinking questions with some of the social change arena's most commonly asked questions. Which do you think will lead to a more humane, healthy world?

Common planning questions	Catalytic Thinking questions
Purpose: • What is the problem, and how will we solve it? • How can we prevent the problem from hurting us in the future? • What are the obstacles to achieving our goal? • Things are shifting so quickly; what might we can accomplish in the next 2 years? • What do we think we could get funded?	*Purpose:* • What is the future we want to create? For whom? • What will be possible once our problems are solved? After eliminating those "bad" conditions, what would "good" look like? • What conditions will lead to that goal like a line of dominoes? And what pre-conditions will lead to those conditions? And then again, what pre-conditions will lead to *those* pre-conditions? • What core values align with / reflect the future we want to see? What will it take to walk the talk of those values in all our actions and decisions?
People: • Who is the target population / audience this effort intends to help / address? • How can we protect ourselves from / differentiate ourselves from others who do similar work as us (our competition)?	*People:* • Who will be affected by any actions we take? And who else? Who will be affected by *their* reactions? • Who else cares about the results we are seeking? Who does similar work as us? • What could all of us accomplish together that none of us can accomplish on our own? • What will it take for our work to be designed and built together with all those individuals and groups? • What conditions need to be in place for us to trust and work together as partners who care about the same result? • What would true inclusivity, openness, and participation look like at every level of our work, so that the efforts are "owned" by everyone who cares about the results?
Resources: • Where will the money come from? • How can we stay as competitive as possible in the funding marketplace?	*Resources:* • What real resources (non-cash) do we need? Who already has what we need? What will it take to partner with them to share those resources? • What are we learning that we can share with others, so the whole field learns what works?

Asking even one of these questions opens the doors to greater potential. Conversations and situations shift as you change the questions you ask, often quickly and dramatically.

Even more powerful is the shift that happens when we ask these questions together, in sequence. Why in sequence? Because Catalytic Thinking harnesses *causality* in service to the future we want. And because causality is linear – this will cause that, and that will cause the next thing - the greatest power of these questions lies in asking them in order.

1. Who will be affected by our decision / action? No matter what the decision or action is, who will be impacted? And then who will be impacted by *them*?

2. Listening to those individuals: What positive outcome do they want? What strengths do they bring to the issue? What are the values at the heart of the issue for them? What would those individuals need in order to be part of the decision, to fully participate?

3. Grounded in what you learn from listening, what is the highest potential outcome for each of those parties – including the highest potential outcome for you? What would "good" look like? If the decision is about a problem, what would "good" look like if the problem were no longer there? And then what would those good situations make possible? For whom? (The more you ask "What would that make possible?" the more aspirational your goals will be – and the more you'll find agreement in that vision.)

4. In order for that high potential outcome to be reality, what conditions would need to be in place? What would people need to feel, have, know, value, be assured of?

5. What actions will create those conditions for success? Who else cares about what you care about, and what actions could you take together, to accomplish what no one individual or group could accomplish on its own?

6. What do you need internally, in order to take those actions? What do you and your team need to feel, have, know, understand, be assured of? What will it take to walk the talk of your values as you take action?

7. To create those internal conditions for success, who can you collaborate with? Who can you share resources with?

As with everything at Creating the Future, we hope you will share your experience as you practice asking more catalytic questions.