



CREATING THE FUTURE  
Change the Questions, Change the World!

# Community Engagement Plan:

## What's Next for Creating the Future's Mission? Fall 2022

### Background

It all started with a discussion of succession planning in the fall of 2021. Creating the Future's Integrity Body (known elsewhere as the Board) began applying Catalytic Thinking to that topic, asking, *"What does succession planning make possible for all the people who are impacted by our mission?"* What immediately became clear is that succession is not about replacing one person with another; it is about ensuring continuity of the benefit folks receive from the organization.

So then, what exactly is that benefit? What is it that needs to continue? In other words,

### What's next for Creating the Future?

By January of 2022, that question had become our most important focus – not just at face value, but because of the 10-year nature of our mission.\* Realizing that we were stepping into Year 5 of that 10 years, the question of "what's next" became everything.

Our mission has always been to experiment, to see what happens when we apply Catalytic Thinking to a variety of systems in a variety of settings - and to then share what we learn in those experiments. In our first five years, we experimented a ton – so much so, that documenting and sharing what we had learned often took a back seat.

What became clear in our "What's next?" discussions is a) we don't need to do a lot more experimenting. Everywhere we have applied Catalytic Thinking, it has consistently brought out the best in people in those situations, creating a future different than the past. That led to b) our focus in the next five years must be documenting what we've learned and then sharing that as broadly as possible.

Given that mission focus, then, what exactly will Creating the Future DO? What programs will we have? What will our work be, to document and share all that Catalytic Thinking has made possible where we have applied it?

\* From the beginning, Creating the Future has had a 10-year mission. This is not to say that we would sunset in 10 years, but that we would use that timeframe as motivation to take our shot – like the shot clock in basketball. If we know we only have 10 years to make an impact, what will that impact be? And what will it take to accomplish that?



## **Which brings us to today**

To understand why “succession planning” became “community engagement about what’s next for Creating the Future, we need to go back a few years, when our board reconfigured its role in the organization. Decisions at Creating the Future would no longer be made by the board, a group of people who are significantly removed from the work and its impacts. Instead, decisions would be made by those most affected by the decision. (It was at that same time that the “board” renamed itself the “Integrity Body” – a group whose job is not to make decisions, but to ensure that decisions are walking the talk of our values.)

That fits with the first question in Catalytic Thinking: “Who will be affected by whatever decision we are about to make? And what would it take for them to lead that discussion and make that decision?”

**What that means for the question of “What’s Next?”** is simple: It is not up to the members of some inner circle to determine what’s next for the organization. It is up to our community members – the people who will be affected by those decisions.

To that end, members of our community joined the Integrity Body this summer, to create a plan for convening our community members to do just that.

The following is that engagement plan, which was developed by asking the questions of Catalytic Thinking.

Before we dive into the plan, though, it is important to take a moment to appreciate and celebrate the conversations that led to this point, because, as it always does, Catalytic Thinking helped guide those conversations to “essence.” The essence of succession planning is not replacing Mary with Joe; it is ensuring that the mission will continue to be accomplished, on behalf of those who benefit from that mission. The essence of decisions that affect other people is that they are able to make those decisions for themselves.

The fact that such thinking guides every decision and action at Creating the Future is a celebration of what our values look like in action. And that is pretty exciting!



# Community Engagement Plan

The purpose of this plan is to engage our community members in determining what's next for Creating the Future's mission.

The questions we asked were [the questions of Catalytic Thinking](#).

- 1) Who will be affected by whatever is next for Creating the Future's work?
- 2) What is the best possible outcome of connecting, for all those groups and individuals?
- 3) What conditions need to be in place for those outcomes to be realized?
- 4) What actions will we take, to put those conditions into place?
- 5) What needs to be in place within Creating the Future, for us to execute those actions?

The following pages share the answers we found as we asked those questions.

## ***Question 1: Who will be affected by whatever is next for Creating the Future?***

Normally we would ask the second part of that question as well: "And what will it take for them to make those decisions?" For this plan, however, the answer to "*What will it take?*" will be this plan! And so we didn't lead with that, knowing that the result of the whole plan would be our answer.

The following are the various groups we determined would be affected by whatever happens next at Creating the Future.

- People who interact with our stuff and share it broadly
- Young people who are excited about creating their own future
- Hildy, Dimitri, the folks who currently sit on the Integrity Body. Any future members who may serve on a future body would also be impacted
- Folks who are intentional practitioners of Catalytic Thinking
- Networks of practitioners –people receiving the content from others
- All of the people who have yet to discover this work
- Current and potential future employees
- Family and friends – this is about how we be together
- Anyone who may be asking "How can I effectively contribute to change around me?" whether that question is being asked in reference to big, societal change or small, personal change.
- Change-makers – folks who are looking to make change, whether that is individual activists or people looking to make change within organizations
- As a subset of changemakers – the change-making institutions and their leaders will be impacted. Those people who are intentionally creating movement and community change, who are looking at better ways to support thriving communities.
- Creating the Future as an entity and all of us who are a part of it

You can read [the full summary of that conversation here](#).

**Question 2: What is the best possible outcome of connecting, for all those groups and individuals?**

Catalytic Thinking encourages us to look beyond the organization doing the engaging. So often engagement is an exercise in “*What’s in it for the organization?*” Catalytic Thinking instead encourages us to focus on the people we hope to engage. And while we did ask about what engagement would make possible for us as an organization, that came towards the end of the discussion. The vast majority of our time was focused on what engagement could make possible for the people we engage.

In answer to that question, three main themes arose:

1. Engagement makes possible feeling connected, valued, building relationships
2. Engagement makes possible learning and getting beyond assumptions
3. Engagement makes possible a shift in power

As for what engaging will make possible for Creating the Future, the answer is simple: We will be walking the talk of our values, ensuring that whatever is next for accomplishing the organization’s mission is led by the people who will be affected by and benefit from that work.

Ultimately, what became clear is that the goal of engagement is an engaged community.

- ~ A place where people feel connected.
- ~ A place where people feel they are growing, learning.
- ~ And especially a place where people feel they own their community and have the power to make change.

You can read [a summary of that discussion here](#), and [a detailed breakdown of the full conversation here](#).



### **Question 3: What conditions need to be in place for those outcomes to be realized?**

During the next several meetings, we asked questions such as “What do people need to know, in order to feel connected?” and “What do people need to be assured of, in order to feel ownership over their community?” You can see summaries of the full discussions [here](#) and [here](#) – and we recommend that you do. The following “Cliff Notes” version, condensed for this report, does not do justice to the richness of those conversations.

Several key themes emerged in those discussions – conditions that must be in place for people to engage. The following are themes that occurred to us as we thought about those discussions. (Numbers are for reference only. They don’t signify importance.)

1) To engage and participate, people must feel **a sense of “US” together / connectedness.**

In a world of us-and-them, what will create a big “us”?

2) To engage and participate, people must **feel they are trusted to make decisions.**

The only way to not do stuff TO people is to authentically include them as decision-makers. What will it take for people to step into their power to make this decision?

3) To engage and participate, people must **feel the desired outcome is something they believe in.**

Outcomes are easier to unify around than tactics. We tend to agree / get excited by the WHY; tend to argue about the WHAT and HOW. What will it take for people to feel that outcome-focus?

4) To engage and participate, people must **feel comfortable with the methods of participating.**

What will it take for our engagement activities to meet people where they are – to align with how people prefer to communicate, how they feel comfortable doing so?

5) To engage and participate, people need to know / feel **the benefits to them personally (WIIFM).**

What will it take for people to feel there is an immediate and apparent benefit to them personally?

For a detailed look at each of these conditions and possible actions to create those conditions, see the Appendix.



## **Question 4: What actions will we take, to put those conditions into place?**

As the work team discussed the nuts and bolts of turning these conditions into actions, the following is the plan they devised. At every step, the conditions noted above will be front of mind, to ensure those actions have the best potential for success.

### **Step 1: Invite**

Draft invitations, including video invitations from peers / community members. There will be some promotion as well, but primarily, people must feel invited. Applying Catalytic Thinking to the crafting of those invitations, make sure to address the conditions noted in this review.

Invitees will include the first ripple in our connections, those most closely affected by our work (per Question 1 above): our eJournal subscribers, past and current supporters (donors, volunteers, team members), past board members, members of our Facebook group for consultants and coaches to social change groups, fellows, students, participants in our programs, partners in past demonstration projects.

### **Step 2: Survey**

Community members will be invited to answer a survey, focused on the first three Catalytic Thinking questions: 1) *Who will be affected by what's next for Creating the Future?* 2) *What is the best possible outcome of our work, for all those individuals and groups?* 3) *What is important to the respondents about Creating the Future's work?* Responses to the survey will be gathered and grouped into themes for reporting the results.

### **Step 3: Follow-up**

Responses to the survey will be shared with all community members, whether they responded to the survey or not. People will be encouraged to share what arises as they read the responses.

All correspondence (such as the sharing of this data) will be provided in a way that helps people feel connected to each other, feel that they are learning, and feel that they are the ones leading this conversation and ultimate decision.



#### **Step 4: Connection via Asynchronous Discussion**

Create a mechanism for asynchronous communication between participants – email listserv, Slack channel, LinkedIn group, etc. Seed discussion among engagement team members, to encourage and create a safe environment for discussion.

#### **Step 5: Facilitated Discussion**

Rooted in the answers to the survey – the first few Catalytic Thinking questions - community members will be invited to continue that discussion via facilitated conversations, to discuss the conditions that must be in place for the outcomes they noted to become reality.

The results of those discussions will be gathered and grouped into themes for sharing the results with our community members.

#### **Step 6: Follow-up**

Key points from the facilitated discussions will be shared with all community members, whether they were part of those discussions or not. People will be encouraged to share what arises as they read those notes – share with Creating the Future, with each other, as well as sharing any aha's / reflections with their broader community.

#### **Step 7: Prioritize**

If the work so far results in too many possible actions, actions will need to be prioritized to determine, “Which of these is most important to do now? Which can wait?”

That prioritizing will be done by our community members via a facilitated conversation, using [a matrix](#) to weigh possible actions against objective decision-making criteria. The group themselves will come up with those criteria, and will then go through the exercise of using the matrix to determine which actions to prioritize.

## **Question 5: What needs to be in place within Creating the Future, for us to execute those actions?**

Once decisions have been made about the direction Creating the Future will take in the remaining five years of our mission, implementing that plan will be the work of Creating the Future's work teams. In other words, our community will determine what's next, and we will figure out what it will take internally to make that a reality.

Those internally focused questions will determine the organizational conditions that need to be in place, to bring the community's vision to life.

### **In Conclusion:**

If Creating the Future's work is to provide the most benefit possible to our community, the community must be integral in deciding what that work will focus on. By creating conditions for our community members to meaningfully participate in that decision, we have the best chance of accomplishing our mission. To be able to accomplish that in the next 5 years would truly be a contribution to a healthy, human, equitable world that works for all of us.





# Appendix: Conditions for success

In Question 3, we asked about conditions for success – what needs to be in place for our outcomes to be realized? The following are the main categories our answers addressed:

- 1) To engage and participate, people must feel **a sense of “US” together / connectedness.**

In a world of us-and-them, what will create a big “us”?

- 2) To engage and participate, people **must feel they are trusted to make decisions.**

The only way to not do stuff TO people is to authentically include them as decision-makers. What will it take for people to step into their power to make this decision?

- 3) To engage and participate, people must **feel the desired outcome is something they believe in.**

Outcomes are easier to unify around than tactics. We tend to agree / get excited by the WHY; tend to argue about the WHAT and HOW. What will it take for people to feel that outcome-focus?

- 4) To engage and participate, people must feel **comfortable with the methods of participating.**

What will it take for our engagement activities to meet people where they are – to align with how people prefer to communicate, how they feel comfortable doing so?

- 5) To engage and participate, people need to **know / feel the benefits to them personally (WIIFM).**

What will it take for people to feel there is an immediate and apparent benefit to them personally?

The following details flesh out those necessary conditions for ensuring we achieve the desired outcomes. Some potential actions were then identified that could establish those conditions.



# 1) For people to participate, they must feel a sense of US together / connectedness

*In a world of us-and-them, what will create a big “us”? It will require **peer-to-peer connection, learning together, experiencing together something bigger than ourselves, and mutual accountability.***

## Peer-to-peer connection may look like...

- The mutual accountability of “us together.” Getting beyond savior complex. Giving the mic to the people who are most affected.
- Being IN community vs engaging THE community
- “I AM you” vs. “I HEAR you”
- In community, we can influence the environment and each other
- To join, people must see themselves reflected in the group in all ways, including a diversity of age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other factors.

### What will it take for people to feel / experience peer-to-peer connection from the start?

- Invitation must come from peers who are already feeling mutual accountability with Creating the Future
- Participants must have the opportunity to connect not just with Creating the Future, but with each other.

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Focus on INVITING vs. simply PROMOTING a meeting / conversation. Focus the invitation itself on peer-to-peer connection. Have the invitation come from a team of inviters and welcomees who are peers of the prospective participants (vs. just Hildy or board members) - supporters of all kinds (volunteers, donors), fellows, students, cohort members, project partners
- Create opportunities for people to connect to each other via facilitated group conversations AND asynchronous conversation (Listserv? Slack?)
- Make sure facilitated conversations provide space for connecting. Questions might include not only introducing themselves via “What’s been meaningful in your life recently?” but also, “What value has Creating the Future had for you personally?” – questions that open the door for true listening.

## Learning together and experiencing something bigger than ourselves may look like...

- “We all come together / share power TOGETHER” vs. “WE are engaging YOU”
- Multi-directional connection vs. two way
- Exploring together new ways of being and thinking, ALL of us learning and having aha’s
- People connecting with each other and genuinely getting to know each other

### What will it take for people to experience “learning and experiencing together something bigger than ourselves” from the start?

- All language, from invitation to ongoing, must reflect “all of us learning and practicing together.”
- All engagement activities must be focused on learning together and creating a whole that is wiser than the sum of the parts

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Define and create mechanisms for shared learning.
- Focus the invitation itself on both learning together and experiencing something bigger than ourselves. Be explicit about that.



1) For people to participate, they must feel a sense of US together / connectedness (cont)

**Mutual accountability may look like...**

- People feeling that this is authentic vs extractive
- Lessening the load any individual needs to carry because we're in it together
- Getting beyond savior complex. Giving the mic to the people who are most affected.
- Changing accountability from us/them to WE / all of us to each other
- Co-owned. Don't need "community buy-in" if it's owned by the community
- It's not about activating community voice. People are already talking. It's also not about "us" listening to "them." It's about spaces for all of us to listen to each other, and make meaning from that together.

**What will it take for people to feel / experience mutual accountability from the start?**

- See examples of mutual accountability in action (e.g. people participating in our meetings to date)
- Participants need to receive as much as they give – learning, wisdom, growth, joy, opportunities for their own work (vs. just helping us)

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS:**

- Share roles in the actual facilitation, small and large roles people can step into
- In both the invitation and the actual activities, state that we will be deciding together re: what is best for everyone, not just "what's best for the organization."

2) For people to participate, they must feel they are trusted to make the ultimate decisions.

*The only way to not do stuff TO people is for them to authentically be the decision-makers.*

**What will lead to people feeling they have that power?**

**People feeling they have the power to make decisions may look like...**

- People must both HAVE the power to create change and FEEL they have that power
- Beyond our community members trusting Creating the Future, Creating the Future must trust our community members
- It's not about activating community voice. It's about LISTENING to what community members are already saying.
- Co-creating, co-designing – all of us together
- When I'm in community, I can influence people and environment. When I'm in an audience, I have no influence. I am just receiving what is given and can only like it / agree or not.
- Movements are about connection and power. The ultimate goal would therefore not be about engaging the community; it must be about people having the power to make change.
- The result is co-owned. Don't need "community buy-in" if the community owns it.
- Engagement is different than "outreach." Engagement is about listening together as one big "us" / outreach is about telling, an activity we do to GET something.

**What will it take for people to feel / experience their power to decide from the start?**

- The power to make the decisions about what's next for Creating the Future must be authentically shared. Facilitation must be all of us together, all sharing ideas, wisdom, experience.
- Ongoing reminders explicitly noting that we are deciding TOGETHER, and that whatever is co-decided will be the path we will take – because this is not the norm.
- People need to see that in the invitation, to join in the first place
- People must feel supported in making decisions. They will need knowledge, tools, and personal support.



2) For people to participate, they must feel they are trusted to make the ultimate decisions.(cont)

## POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- In every action, model what it looks like to step away from the power to decide, and to instead have our community decide what's next. That means no one will have any more voice or authority than anyone else, and continuing to step back from making the decision(s) ourselves.
  - Design all activities to be mutual, deciding together. That includes finding ways for surveys and other one-person activities to be shared.
  - When determining which activities to prioritize over others, use group decision-making approaches ([a decision-making matrix](#), for example) to ensure the participants have the tools for objective decision-making.
  - Provide clarity around how responses will be summarized so far, so people can build on the wisdom of their peers
  - Creating the Future must trust that our community will be wise in their conversations and decisions. People will only trust us if we trust them.
  - Invitations to participate must authentically emphasize that “we” are not inviting “them” to “participate” – all of us together will create what's next. That might include language that indicates...
    - We don't have the answer. This is NOT a focus group, with a predefined outcome and “what do you think?” YOU will make the decision about what's next for our mission.
    - If you've ever thought, “*I wish Creating the Future would do X*” or “*I wish Creating the Future had Y,*” YOU can make that happen. YOU Have the power to determine what's next.
    - Be part of shifting how work is done in the social change arena

## 3) For people to participate, they must feel the desired OUTCOME is something they believe in

*Outcomes are easier to unify around than tactics. We tend to agree / get excited by the WHY; tend to argue about the WHAT and HOW. **What will lead people to come together around a common outcome?***

### Feeling the desired OUTCOME is something they believe in may look like...

- People need to be assured that the ultimate goal is to accomplish our mission (experimenting and sharing what we've learned about Catalytic Thinking), towards the vision of a more humane, healthy, equitable world. Further, they must see that the goal is NOT simply to sustain Creating the Future (organization-centric). Emphasis must be on that community-centered outcome, not on sustaining an organization.
- People must feel confident that our mission requires that we BE engaged and open – that that is a big part of what it takes to share what we've learned in a way that is effective (the outcome). That openness and engagement are part of the DNA of our mission vs. an activity we do just when we want something.
- They must have a sense that they are creating something bigger than themselves
- The process must model a possible path in the chaos of the real world, towards their own desired outcomes
- Focus must be on the result vs. tactics (the WHY vs. the HOW)
- “You will create what's next for you AND the world” (vs. “We want YOU to help US do a thing”)
- The issues being discussed must be the things our community members care about



3) For people to participate, they must feel the desired OUTCOME is something they believe in (cont)

What will it take for people to feel / experience an outcomes focus from the start?

- Every aspect of the design of what's next must be focused on high-potential outcomes, from the invitation to be part of that design to the facilitation of those conversations.
- People need a process for determining the best possible outcome. They will need support in determining that outcome, because outcome-focus is not the norm.

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS:**

- Be clear about our vision and mission in all communications
- Be clear about our 10-year "shot clock" in all communications, including what we've accomplished in the first 5 years and that this effort is to determine the next 5 years.
- Show how programs / activities / tactics will fit into the mission.

**4) For people to participate, they must feel comfortable with the methods of engaging**

*People need a variety of ways to participate that align with THEIR needs. Some people are already excited by Creating the Future's work, while others are newer to that work, perhaps intrigued and want to learn more. Some want to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, while others want to learn / practice Catalytic Thinking. Some are slow, quiet thinkers who prefer to respond on their own; others prefer group process. Some have time to attend a 2-hour facilitated session, while others are only able to fill in a survey. **What will lead to ALL those different people feeling the conversation about "What's next" is for them?***

**People feeling comfortable to participate may look like....**

- People must be able to step into a variety of ways to participate, along the [Continuum of Potential](#)
- People must be able to be included, whether they have a lot of time to participate, or just a few minutes.
- Acknowledgement that some people will engage by listening quietly and taking what they hear into their world. We will not hear back from them, and that's ok.
- "You can effect change in alignment with what you're passionate about"
- Whatever processes are employed, they must emphasize asking people and listening to understand their experience (vs. "putting yourself in someone else's shoes")
- Being mindful that people who we perceive as "Hard to reach" quickly become those who are simply easy to ignore

**What will it take for people to feel / experience these conditions from the start?**

- Every aspect of the design of what's next, from the invitation to be part of that design to the facilitation of those conversations, must consider the various ways people prefer to participate – true inclusion.
- People need to see themselves in the methods of engaging. "No problem, I can do that."



4) For people to participate, they must feel comfortable with the methods of engaging (cont)

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS:**

- Determine and design the various ways people can participate
  - Facilitated group discussion
  - Surveys with the facilitation questions
  - Blog the questions and encourage written responses for those who think best by writing
  - One-on-one conversations
- Word the invitation to emphasize “strengths, values, aspirations” of [Catalytic Listening](#) to reflect their value as part of the whole
- Invitation language must reflect the various ways people can participate. For example...
  - Invite using language along the [Continuum of Potential](#).
  - “If you benefit from Creating the Future’s work...”
  - “Sharing who you ARE / your wisdom as a contribution to the whole” (vs. contributing to the cause with what you HAVE)
  - Not just *meeting* people where they are, but *honoring* where they are



**5) For people to participate, they need to feel that participating will benefit them personally (WIIFM)**

*What will lead to people feeling that their participation will have immediate & apparent benefit for them? Some conditions for feeling they are benefiting include a sense of energy and hope; the ability to connect with others; a source of pride; an opportunity to learn and practice.*

**Energy, hope may look like...**

- All our engagement efforts must demonstrate energy
- Make people feel like they can make a difference
- “Time speeds by when I’m engaged”

**What will it take for people to feel / experience energy and hope from the start?**

- People must experience energy and hope in every communication and interaction. All aspects of this effort must convey energy – including the survey and other pieces
- Catalytic Thinking will provide energy during all facets of the facilitation / conversation

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS:**

- Video? Many voices?
- Be explicit re: this is energizing!

**Connecting with others who care about what they care about may look like...**

- COMMUNE with your fellow future-creators (we need a better word than this!)
- People want to be with people they know and admire (e.g. Join Maria, Joelle, Ricardo, and Mike for an opportunity to \_\_\_\_\_)
- People need opportunities to connect and think together
- People need to feel they are in common cause with others

5) For people to participate, they need to feel that participating will benefit them personally (WIIFM) (cont)

### What will it take for people to feel / experience that connection from the start?

- Clarity around the types of people they will be with (energetic, passionate, thoughtful, etc.) and the topics to be discussed – that they will be with people who also care about those issues.
- Clarity around the ways we will summarize and report back to the group
- Clarity around opportunities to connect asynchronously between activities

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- In the invitation, testimonials from people who have joined us and feel connected (cohorts, individuals who enjoy participating in our discussions)
- A platform for connecting asynchronously (listserv, LinkedIn group, Slack, etc.)

### Participating as a source of pride may look like...

- People need to see themselves reflected in the result
- People want to point with pride – I did that!
- People FEEL for what happens. It matters what happens.
- Participation as an expression of who I am as a person

### What will it take for people to feel / experience that sense of pride from the start?

- See it in others with whom they are participating
- The opportunity to reflect together, to step back and celebrate throughout their work.
- Opportunities to share their reflections & aha's via their own social media

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Be explicit about this in the invitation. "You will be able to point to whatever we create with pride..."
- Testimonials from those who DO point with pride to participating
- Encourage them to share their aha's broadly

### Opportunities to learn and practice may look like...

- Space to practice stepping into their power. Confidence to engage and construct the world
- How to do collaborative decision-making in YOUR work. What creates an environment where people can take practical steps in THEIR community?
- Beyond contributing to shared knowledge, each person will learn and grow. Learning by DOING.
- Building the capacity of the group
- Practice constructive ways of disagreeing with each other
- Iterative – people need to see it again and again.

### What will it take for people to feel / experience learning and practicing from the start?

- People need to know this will be a learning environment – that you will gain knowledge of "stuff" and perhaps even knowledge of yourself.
- The intention to provide opportunities to learn beyond just the meetings (recorded classes, etc.)
- Clear understanding of what they'll learn – that this is an opportunity to learn
- People need to feel safe to learn and explore together.
- To feel safe, people need to know the process ahead of time / know what to expect

### POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Provide video classes, additional Q&A/ discussions, etc.
- Invitation is explicit about what they will learn if they participate

