



A FORESIGHT TOOLKIT RESOURCE

Three Ways to Integrate Foresight Into Your Work

Strategic foresight does not require a dedicated office, a consulting budget, or a new initiative. It requires a little intentional space — and three small practices you can begin this month.

THE IDEA

Foresight is not a project that ends. It is a habit of attention. The practices below are deliberately small, because small practices are the ones that survive a busy semester. Each one can be started without permission, without funding, and without adding a meeting to anyone's calendar.

Practice One

Start a Signal Log

A signal is an early sign of change — a small shift or emerging pattern that may point toward a larger transformation. Signals are easy to miss because, individually, they look unimportant. The discipline is simply to notice them and write them down.

How to begin: Create one shared document — nothing more elaborate than that. Invite anyone on your team to add a short note whenever they notice something that feels different: a shift in what students are asking for, a change in how employers talk about skills, an unexpected enrollment pattern, a new behavior around technology. Once a month, spend fifteen minutes reviewing the log together.

Why it works: The goal is not to predict the future correctly. It is to become less surprised by it. Over time, the power comes not from any single signal but from seeing several signals at once —

and noticing the pattern they form. Rural colleges have a real advantage here: they sit close to their communities and see change early. A signal log simply makes that natural awareness visible and shared.

Practice Two

Run an Assumption Audit

Every strategic plan, every major investment, every new program contains hidden assumptions about the future. An assumption audit makes those assumptions visible so your team can decide whether it actually believes them.

How to begin: Pick one goal from your current strategic plan. In a ninety-minute session with your cabinet, list everything that would need to be true for that goal to succeed in five years. Sort each assumption into green, yellow, or red by how confident you are. Then stress-test the reds: if a red assumption proved false, would the plan bend or break? You will learn more in that hour and a half than in most year-long planning processes.

Why it works: It shifts the conversation from problem-solving to examining the beliefs underneath your decisions — and it costs nothing but focused attention.

A full step-by-step guide to this practice is available as a separate resource in this toolkit: *How to Run an Assumption Audit*.

Practice Three

Ask the Question

The smallest practice is also, in some ways, the most powerful. It requires no document and no meeting — only a single question, asked at the right moment.

How to begin: The next time your team is about to make a real strategic decision — a hire, an investment, a new program, a facilities choice — pause and ask: "**What future are we assuming this decision will work in?**" Let the group answer honestly. Then ask how confident everyone is that the assumed future will actually arrive.

Why it works: The question interrupts tempocentrism — the quiet, default assumption that the future will look much like the present. It does not slow decisions down; it makes them more conscious. Used regularly, it turns foresight from a special activity into simply how your institution thinks.

Putting it together

These three practices reinforce one another. The signal log helps you *notice* change. The assumption audit helps you *examine* what your plans depend on. And the question keeps foresight present in the *everyday decisions* that quietly shape your institution's direction. Begin with whichever one fits your team most easily. The point is not to do all three perfectly. The point is to make a little intentional space for the future — before it arrives.

This resource is part of the Community College Futures Lab foresight toolkit. To bring strategic foresight more deeply into your institution — through workshops, board sessions, and foresight-informed strategic planning — visit ccfutureslab.com or write to hello@ccfutureslab.com.