The 5-Box Scenario Planning Tool

# Step 1. Construct the Scenarios

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| **Assumptions** ↓ | **Scenario A: [Name]** | **Scenario B: [Name]** | **Scenario C: [Name]** |
| **Key Assumption**[[1]](#footnote-1)  (e.g., Timing: When do we think the restrictions resulting from the pandemic will end?) |  |  |  |
| **Programmatic Impact:** How deeply would our programs be impacted (and how)? |  |  |  |
| **Financial Impact:**How will our finances (especially revenues) be impacted? |  |  |  |
| **People Impact:** How would this impact our staff, volunteers, clients, partners, other stakeholders? |  |  |  |
| **Scenario Summary** → |  |  |  |

# Step 2. Create an Action Plan for One Scenario

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| **Scenario Name & Description** | **Our Strategy**  The overall approach you’ll take if the scenario comes true |
| *Copy and paste the scenario name and scenario summary from the “Constructing the Scenarios” page here.* |  |
| **Immediate Next Steps, Timelines, & Owners**  List the actions you’ll take to pursue the strategy. These could be “no regrets” moves, options to buy you time, and/or innovative ideas you want to try out | **Ideas for Future Consideration**  Keep track of things you want to do eventually as the scenario becomes more likely to happen. You can also use this section as a parking lot for ideas. |
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| **Indicators to Track (and Owners)**  Note metrics to track. These could be metrics that indicate if a scenario is coming true and/or that help you see if the steps you’ve taken so far are successful. | |
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# The 5-Box Scenario Planning Tool Sample

IRN (Immigrants Rights Now) is an organization whose mission is to build support for comprehensive immigration reform by bringing awareness of immigrants' issues to the general public. It has 40 paid staff (with 80% identifying as BIPOC) and over 100 volunteers with operations in 10 states. Volunteers are mostly youth of color who are undocumented and/or have undocumented family members. IRN organizes "Days of Action”—mass protests at key sites to highlight the injustices and inequities in the US immigration system. 50% of its revenue comes from grants and the other 50% from small donations raised around each Day of Action. Their original goal had them holding 100 days of action across the 10 states in 2020.

# Step 1. Construct the Scenarios

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| **Assumptions** ↓ | **Scenario A: Optimistic** | **Scenario B: Most Likely** | **Scenario C: Pessimistic** |
| **Key Assumption**  Timing: When do we think the restrictions resulting from the pandemic will end? | New case counts in the US rise until April; growth in cases halted through social distancing, travel restrictions, etc. Unemployment rate drops by June. Quick V-shaped recovery through summer. | Epidemic peaks in May in the US; cases slow through social distancing, travel restrictions, etc. Public more optimistic by June-July. Recession through Q3. | Epidemic peaks in the U.S.in May-June due to delayed testing and weak social distancing. Rolling peaks across the country. Prolonged recession, layoffs, bankruptcies, and massive unemployment. |
| **Programmatic Impact:** How deeply would our programs be impacted (and how)? | Minor Impact: We have to cancel 20% of Days of Action protests (April through June). | Medium Impact: We have to cancel 50-60% of Days of Action (Apr. through Sept.). | High Impact: We have to cancel all in-person protests through the end of the year. |
| **Financial Impact:**How will our finances (especially revenues) be impacted? | Lose $3M in revenue raised; No loss of major donors expected. | Lose 70% of small-donor revenue; Expect to lose 20% of major donors. | Lose 90% of small-donor revenue. Expect to lose 40% of major donors. |
| **People Impact:** How would this impact our staff, volunteers, clients, partners, other stakeholders? | Reduction in volunteer engagement as events are canceled. | We will see significant drop-off in volunteer engagement and community support. Heightened emotional toll as the Days of Action that serve to empower and energize staff and volunteers get canceled. | |
| **Scenario Summary** → | As the curve of the pandemic quickly flattens, the economy will see a V-shaped recovery. We expect a return to normal by June. We have to cancel Days of Action scheduled for the spring with a 15% drop in 2020 revenue, but no major long-term damage to the organization or its mission. | The US economy will enter into a recession through Q3 caused by the pandemic peaking in May. We have to cancel all in-person protests and associated programs thru Sept. As a result, we expect a nearly 45% drop in 2020 revenue. | We are confronting a deep and prolonged recession that will continue into 2021. We have to cancel all scheduled program work and Days of Action for the rest of the year. We expect to lose almost 65% of 2020 revenue with impacts well into 2021. |

# Step 2. Create an Action Plan for One Scenario

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| **Scenario Name & Description** | **Our Strategy** |
| **Scenario B (The Most Likely Scenario):** The US economy will enter into a recession through Q3 caused by the pandemic peaking in May. We have to cancel all in-person protests and associated programs through Sept. As a result, we expect a nearly 45% drop in 2020 revenue. | * Make spending cuts such that the revenue and expense curves align again by fall * Create the playbook on “virtual protests” * Identify other ways to build awareness of IR issues |
| **Immediate Next Steps, Timelines & Owners** | **Ideas for Future Consideration** |
| * Apply for PPP through CARES act (done) * Call major donors and test 2020 commitment (Alia, first week of May) * Draft a staged, equitable plan to cut spending (Beata, first week of May) * Propose five ideas for building awareness without holding in-person protests (Carlos, in consultation with the rest of the org, second week of May) * Try out the first “virtual protest” to coincide with May 15 planned Day of Action (Dante, second week of May) * Webinar with volunteers (Elena, end of April, and repeat every other week) | * ID 5 organizations who work with undocumented immigrants to (potentially) partner with * Talk to other orgs in our sector to see how they’re reacting/adapting rallies * Build relationship with Tier 1 media to help broadcast our message * Identify potential new donors |
| **Indicators to Track** | |
| * 50% of the states we operate in are considered “past the peak” by May 30 * 50% of major donors reaffirm 2020 commitment * Turn out and impact measures for the virtual protest on May 15 are at least 40% of what we expect through Days of Action * 60% of volunteers continue participating/engaging virtually * Get approved for PPP grant/loan * We can find a path to a 10% operating cost cut without touching payroll   (If ”‘no” for most of the above, we have to operate as if we are in the Pessimistic scenario)  Next Meeting on May 20 to discuss early indicators and see if we need to trigger the next set of actions | |

1. This is the anchoring assumption that drives the scenario. If the scenario planning process is being driven by COVID-19, it could be the “timing of restrictions.” If you’re doing scenario planning in a non-COVID-19 context, a key assumption might be “who wins the 2020 presidential election” or “The Supreme Court rules X on Y issue.” The other assumptions (programmatic, revenue, and people) follow from the key assumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)