



# Cover Story: A Fun Shared Vision Exercise

**Overview:** The Cover Story engages participants in a creative visioning exercise to imagine their idea, project, or organization as a “cover story” for a published magazine. For example, a team can imagine a Time Magazine or local newspaper “cover” for their university’s work in the community for the year 2015.

This activity provides a variety of tasks—including silent brainstorming, drawing, coming up with clever slogans—that provide people with many ways to explore their visions, ideas, and goals. It helps a team articulate a shared vision while having fun.

**Category:** Visioning and personal development; reflection skills; communication skills

**Level:** Suitable for all levels (introductory to advanced), with an emphasis toward more advanced leadership

**Type:** Structured activities suitable for a workshop

## Focus or Goals of this Guide:

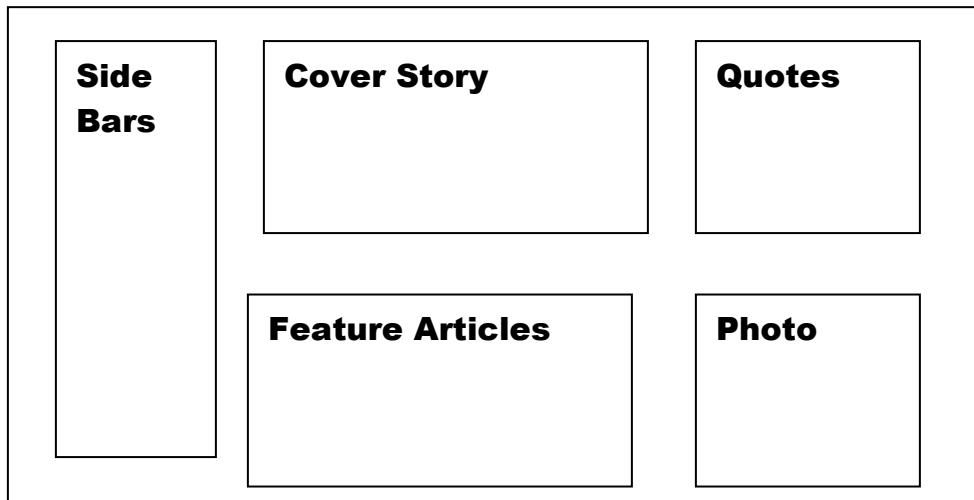
- Provide a forum for small groups (perhaps within a larger setting) to creatively generate a “cover story” about what could happen in the future
- Encourage participants to explore their creativity, visions, and thoughts
- Build teamwork and shared vision for future work

## Materials:

- Very large “cover story” guideline—containing cover, sidebars, photoboxes, quotes, and brainstorming areas arranged in an artistic, welcoming manner. You can make this by taping together 6 standard flip chart pages.

- Markers - enough for everyone in the group plus extras
- Other artistic drawing tools like pencils, crayons, pastels, etc.
- Post-its
- Something upon which to mount the completed posters

The Cover Story is a big poster – made of 6 flip chart pages or on butcher block paper — with the following headings/parts:



### How to Prepare:

Read the activity. Prepare the cover story large posters. Figure out how you want to frame the exercise: what magazine (or newspaper, or web site if you want to get innovative), what idea, how long into the future, etc.

You need enough space to have a semi-circle of chairs clustered around the large poster on the wall. The wall space needs to allow for the total poster and allow people to write and draw on it freely. Don't make the poster smaller: part of what makes this exercise work so well is the "largeness" of the blank paper.

For large groups that will then break into smaller teams (like a corps or program), it's best to have a gym or similar space for this exercise. This allows for all of the groups to work simultaneously in the same space but with some separation and tends to enhance the "creative competition" and focus on the project. It also allows the Gallery Walk, a powerful part of the activity, to happen easier.

### How to Do/Brief Outline:

This is a basic outline based on a two-hour workshop:

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|--|---------------------------|
| 1) Introduction to exercise and scenario | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2) Explain process and roles             | suggested time 5 minutes  |
| 3) Silent Brainstorming                  | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 4) Group Determine Focus                 | suggested time 15 minutes |

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|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5) Group work on rest of Cover Story | suggested time 40 minutes |
| 6) Hear from Process Observer        | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 7) Have group finish poster          | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 8) Convene for Gallery Walk and Wrap | suggested time 20 minutes |
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## 1 Introduction

Suggested time 10 minutes

Facilitators should introduce themselves, roles, why they are there, and general purpose of the activity. You may want to do a very brief warm up that is creative in nature. If participants do not know each other, you may want to do introductions or a name game, depending on the size of the group.

Then, introduce the activity. You can do this in a straightforward manner by reviewing the goals, then presenting the small group(s) with a scenario such as:

**“Imagine that it’s the year 2015. As you are traveling to your service site, you see a news stand with the latest copies of your favorite magazines. Then, on the cover of one, you notice a big headline about your organization. Now, your job as a group is to create that “cover story” and its other elements (sidebars, images, quotes, etc.) here.”**

Or, you can define the magazine and topic. Or, you can simply show the poster and instruct that this exercise is the opportunity for the team to imagine how they would like to be covered, in x number of years. Or each team could decide for themselves the year they would want the magazine to be printed in. Be creative, but get familiar with the entire exercise first.

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## 2 Explain process and roles

Suggested time 5 minutes

Within each group designate ONE OBSERVER who cannot contribute. That person’s role is to observe the process and group dynamics. Figure out whether you want to assign that person (some people strategically assign a person whom they think will be quite vocal) or take a volunteer. If you have multiple groups, make sure to stick to one way of making assignments.

Within each group, there should also be ONE FACILITATOR. That person’s role is to keep the group moving, be concerned about time, and generally facilitate the process. Decide whether you want to choose that person yourself, take a volunteer, or have the group come to a consensus.

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### 3 Silent Brainstorming

Suggested time 10 minutes

When the groups start to work, the facilitator should first go over the cover story poster. Review the task. Give everyone a small stack of post-its. Have people silently write down their ideas for any part of the cover story poster, one idea per post-it. For example, someone might scribble a quote. Someone else might have an idea for the cover headline. Let people do this for 5-10 minutes.

Then, the facilitator should read over all of the post-its to the group. The purpose of this is to see what kinds of ideas have been generated and to spark new ones. Don't allow discussion yet.

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### 4 Determine Focus

Suggested time 15 minutes

Then, the facilitator should focus the group to decide on the cover story. The group may have a strong preference for an item up already, be interested in a new one, or suggest a merged idea. The facilitator needs to decide the process (vote, general agreement, or whatever), but you shouldn't be making the decision yourself. Be careful of dominating, as the facilitator's role is not to do so.

Keep the group moving towards a decision.

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### 5 Group Work on Cover Story

Suggested time 40 minutes

At this point, everyone should work on completing the cover story poster. In general, the facilitator should see how the group handles this task. The group may already be inclined toward self-selecting and delegating out the different "pieces" of the project. If not, the facilitator may want to gently guide the group in that direction. The process observer should continue to observe. (For sessions with less time, you may decide to not use a process observer and more aggressively facilitate the division of tasks, prompted by group members' interests).

At some point during this creation, you may want to interject some thought-provoking questions such as:

- 1) Who are the stakeholders in the projects and efforts that we have accomplished? How do we work with these stakeholders? What value has come of our work for them?
- 2) What is our image in the communities where we work? What do people say about us?
- 3) How do we handle good times? How do we handle stress or hard times?
- 4) What has happened for the community as a result of our work?

Other questions can push the group to consider more far-reaching, impact-oriented, or visionary work.

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## 6 Before time ends, hear from Process Observer

Suggested time 10 minutes

You want to have 1 hour or so for the group work. About 10-15 minutes before that time is over, the facilitator should allow the process observer to make some comments.

The process observer should simply state what s/he observed. Some questions to consider are: Did everyone contribute? What style did the group exhibit? What style did the facilitator use? What ideas did the observer have (and stay silent about)? What was it like to observe (hard or easy).

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## 7 Group finishes board

Suggested time 10 minutes

You want to wrap the small group work by having everyone focus on finishing the poster. Encourage people to use their creativity and add drawings, color, flare, etc. Everyone should also sign his or her name on the poster.

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## 8 Gallery Walk and Wrap

Suggested time 10 minutes

For larger sessions (like with a corps or program), the lead facilitator should reconvene all participants in a large space. A gym is excellent for this exercise. Hang every group's poster.

Next, everyone should do a Gallery Walk. You can allow a member of each team to briefly present their cover story to everyone else before the Gallery Walk. This sharing is a powerful part of the exercise (for larger groups) because it allows people to learn from each other's creativity and ideas.

End the workshop with an appropriate closing reflection, evaluation, and next steps. Reflection can include statements by members of the larger group about their insights, feelings, and experiences.