



Bonner Curriculum

The Cover Story: A Shared Visioning Activity

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 student organization can imagine a Time Magazine or local newspaper “cover” for their university’s work in the community for a year in the future (2-5 years).

This activity involves a variety of tasks — including silent brainstorming, drawing, coming up with clever slogans — which provide people with many ways to explore their visions, ideas, and goals. It helps a team or group to articulate a shared vision through a process that can be engaging and 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

**Recommended
Bonner Sequence:**

This workshop is appropriate for use at any time during the Bonner experience, and it may be repeated. It is a highly creative and open-ended activity, and a vision can be constructed for service, special projects, etc. It’s an excellent component of a project leader training or student leader training. It can also be used for a leadership team (including staff) retreat.

expectation	explore	experience	example	expertise
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VALUES: civic engagement, others as applicable by focus

Type:

Structured activities suitable for a workshop

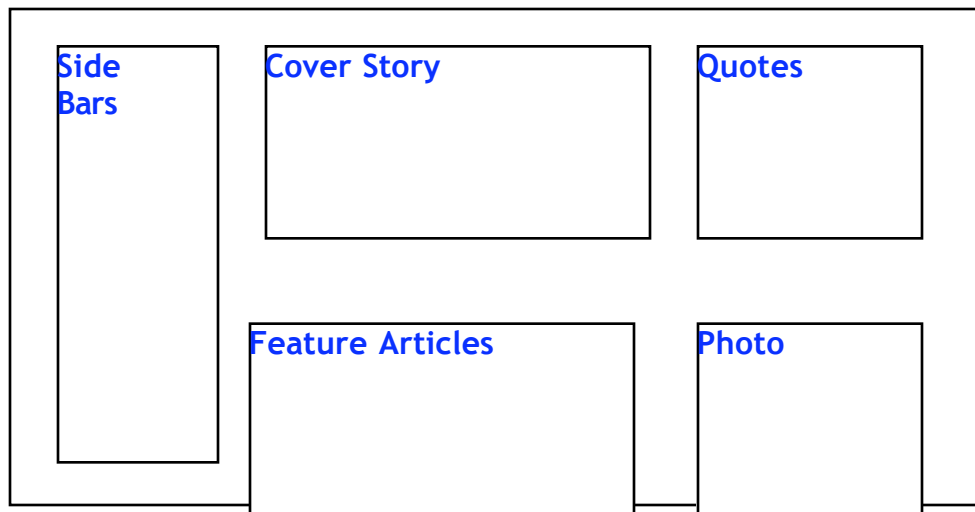
Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Provide a forum for small groups (perhaps within a larger setting) to creatively generate a “cover story” of their work’s future potential
- Encourage participants to explore and utilize skills in creativity, visioning, organizing, and synthesizing information
- Build teamwork and shared vision for a particular project or body of work

Materials:

- Very large “cover story” guideline—containing cover, sidebars, photo boxes, 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
- Masking tape wrapped around markers - one for each group (if breakout spaces are being used)

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. Add some color highlights. 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 campus 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 |
| 5) Group work on rest of Cover Story | suggested time 40 minutes |
| a. Facilitator should interject some tough questions | |
| 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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Step 1) Introduction

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Facilitators should introduce themselves, roles, why they are there, and the 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 it’s the year 2006. 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.”

You should decide the timeframe, but between 1 and 10 years is good (the longer the time, the bigger the thinking, but it may be difficult for some to grasp something they won’t be around for). 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. Be creative, but get familiar with the entire exercise first.

Step 2) Explain the process and roles

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Within each group designate ONE SILENT 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.

Step 3) Facilitator Begins with 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.

At this point, 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.

Step 4) Determine focus for the "Cover" story

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Now, 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. As facilitator, you need to decide the process (vote, general agreement, or whatever), but you shouldn't be making the decision yourself. Be careful of dominating, as your role is not to do so.

Keep the group moving towards a decision.

Step 5) Group works on other portions of the cover story poster

Suggested time: 40 minutes

At this point, everyone should work on completing the cover story poster. In general, you want to see how the group handles this task. Your group may already be inclined toward self-selecting and delegating out the different "pieces" of the project. If not, you 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.

Throughout the creative process, 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 (or city or state or country) as a result of our work?

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

Step 6) Before time ends, hear from the 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 things to consider are: did everyone contribute, what style did the group seem to exhibit, what style did the facilitator seem to use, what ideas did the observer have (and stay silent about), what was it like to observe (hard or easy), and so on.

Step 7) Have the group finish out the 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.

Step 8) Reconvene for 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. Have every group's poster hung.

Next, everyone should do a Gallery Walk. You can allow a member of each team to briefly present their cover story. 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.