

## **Managing A Sphere of Influence: Mutually Beneficial Relationships With Institutional Members In the World Futures Studies Federation**

### **I. Introduction to Institutional Members And Defining A Sphere of Influence**

The World Futures Studies Federation is composed of over four hundred individuals and nearly seventy organizations. As a democratically run organization, the WFSF elects a President and Secretary General every four years. The Executive Board of appointed members exercises oversight of officers, fellows, and membership through projects and specialized contributions (i.e., education, funding, research). As a Futures organization, WFSF hosts a very international membership composition. In particular, the international range of Institutional Members is important. The current list of Institutional Members might be seen as a cross-section of the types of organizations interested in Futures-related activities around the world.

The background to this project was concentrated data-mining on the Institutional Members of the WFSF between September 2002 and May 2003. The compilation of information on the organization that constitutes Institutional Members illuminated these groups as resources, consultants, allies and colleagues in the field. It is this simultaneous diversity and concentration of interests in the future that gives WFSF a true sphere of influence concerning its Institutional Members. Events, trends and emerging issues (both internal and external to the futures studies domain) are presenting opportunities and possibilities with huge potential for the WFSF's status. In order to benefit all members, individual and institutions and for the WFSF to embody a network of competent Futurists and quality Futures activity *relationships* need to be the focus.

As a notable historical force in the Futures domain, the WFSF has a reputation as the international Futures organization. The title *Managing a Sphere of Influence* is meant to convey this notion, and that the WFSF has authority in the Futures world. WFSF has a stake in the political economy of futures as a discipline, and that influence is a tool and might best be understood as a means of making the WFSF better. By definition, enrichment of the Federation converts into improved capabilities of the organizations it serves.

Above all, the WFSF is committed to the future. The institutional members are more than stakeholders; they are social networks, decision-makers, and people who desire to have some positive affect on the future. The Federation operates daily within a sphere of influence interconnected with each of these organizations and at the same time independent of them. As stated on the website [wfsf.org](http://wfsf.org):

*"The WFSF is a forum where the stimulation, exchange, and examination of ideas, visions, and plans for alternative, long-term futures can take place. The Federation promotes and encourages futures studies as well as innovative interdisciplinary analysis and critique by:*

- 1. Promoting a higher level of futures consciousness in general*
- 2. Stimulating cooperative research activities in all fields of futures studies*
- 3. Planning and holding regional and global futures studies conferences and courses*
- 4. Encouraging the democratization of future-oriented thinking and acting*
- 5. Stimulating awareness of the urgent need for futures studies in governments and international organizations, as well as other decision making and educational groups and institutions, to resolve problems at local, national, regional, and global levels, and*
- 6. Assisting local and global futures research activities; encouraging responsibility for future generations.*

*The WFSF seeks to assure complete freedom of activity and discussion among its members and within the Federation. To achieve this goal, the Federation seeks close cooperation with educational, scientific, cultural, artistic, and other institutions, associations, and organizations in all fields of futures studies, especially within the United Nations family"*

Of greatest concern now is the fifth point, "stimulating awareness of the urgent need for futures studies in governments and international organizations." While the member institutes are perhaps stimulated by the publications and emails they receive, are there further services the WFSF could offer these groups to truly stimulate their thinking about the future—and doing quality Futures work? A decline in the number of new Institutional Members forming and even more decline in the existing members that pay dues on time (or at all) is what makes this question relevant now.

There is no question that the WFSF possesses a certain sphere of influence; the scope of Institutional Members makes that a given. Perhaps it is time to extend a strategy of effectiveness in the context of important development and changes going on around us. Purposeful understanding of these factors is the backbone of Futures Studies and in some ways a mindset that the Federation can use to constantly improve the status of both WFSF and its member organizations.

Everyone has a vested interest in the future; as implied by its mission, WFSF recognizes an obligation to the entire world, as all people are stakeholders in the future. Institutional Members are more than stakeholders; they are leaders and decision-makers with an explicit interest in the future, most of whom actively contribute to the Futures field. The inherent value of Institutional Membership is a means by which WFSF can foster Futurist social networks and weave one common thread. There are several possibilities to exercise influence, especially among organizations, to enhance Futures consciousness in human endeavors.

## **II. Driving Forces in the Internal and External Environments Trends, Emerging Issues and Critical Uncertainties**

Any strategic undertaking has to account for the changes taking place right now and analyze their possible impacts. In Futures Studies we typically identify the trends alongside emerging issues and critical uncertainties in order to later set forth actionable plans. WFSF is impacted by trends within the futures field and in particular by the changes within its organizational environment. As a democratically run association, the WFSF is probably more fluid than many other Futures enterprises.

Given the scope of Futures Studies, varying external environments could be identified and dealt with one at a time. Education, environment, policy—indeed all the STEEP categories and more—are domains in which Futurists practice and Futures thinking proliferates. To exert some control over what could be an overwhelming definition of ‘the world’ a few key trends and trend categories were selected to work out some scenario plots. These were, at the time, chosen for their potential impact on the alternative futures of WFSF. Similarly, only internally relevant critical uncertainties and critical issues are incorporated, especially those that most relate to Institutional Members.

### **TRENDS:**

Internal – The World Futures Studies Federation’s immediate domain. Includes Futures Studies as a profession, a field of study, an academic discipline and approach to decision-making.

1. More professional futures organizations forming
2. More futures programs and students in higher education
3. Discussion and debate over applied vs. normative futures
4. Fewer paying members

External – The most pressing trends ‘out there’. Varying degrees of influence on the role of the WFSF, its relationships, and the services that members expect, want and/or need.

1. Non-traditional education and work styles
2. International tensions/anti-Americanism
3. Information overload/digital divide
4. NGO/NPO role in problem-solving

## **EMERGING ISSUES**

1. To take a 'stand' on geopolitics (i.e., peace)
2. How to foster a new generation of futurists
3. How to connect a dispersed community of students and practitioners
4. Ethics and values of the organization

## **CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES**

1. Whether overdue membership fees will be paid, or if new Institutional Members will join.
2. Role with UNESCO and other fund sources; financial future as a Non-Profit.
3. Institutional Member or Influential Individual? Are there individual members of WFSF that should consider switching to Institutional Status, or the opposite? How is it decided?

### **III. Scenario Parameters Matrix** **Four Scenario Parameters: Possible Futures Of Relationships**

Combining internal, external, and emerging factors into one matrix, the Scenario Parameters explore possible futures of WFSF's dealings with institutional members. The logic of each alternative future evokes a certain mood based on the trends and emerging issues identified above. Twelve driving forces are divided into five categories: Social/Cultural, Technology, Economic, Political and Demographic.

The scenario parameters matrix is used to sketch alternative futures and make brief but useful statements about the possibilities in WFSF's future. Read across the rows, it compares the alternative modes in which WFSF could function. As a Mainframe WFSF, the federation does business as usual, a machine moving slow and deliberately. Networked WFSF is where the most mutually beneficial relationships take place; the Federation is plugged into the pulses, needs and demands of the world and its members—and its own values. Default WFSF tends to lean on established methods to make the needed improvements, especially to solve fiscal problems. Corporate models would be the example of Default mindsets. Remote WFSF refers to an isolated future for the WFSF in which it remains distant from events and people, clinging to a traditional academic or university structure. The columns from top to bottom outline the plot of each scenario.

<b>DRIVING FORCES IN THE WFSF</b>	<b>MAINFRAME WFSF: Business As Usual</b>	<b>NETWORKED WFSF: Interactive and Vital</b>	<b>DEFAULT WFSF: Generic Strategy to Achieve Results</b>	<b>REMOTE WFSF: Isolated and Insignificant</b>
<b>SOCIAL/CULTURAL</b>				
More professional futures organizations forming	Membership static	Quality members	Mass Membership	Memberships down
Discussion and debate over applied vs. normative futures	Applied vs. normative	Balance	Strictly Applied	Overtly Normative
Ethics and Values of the organization	The past	Fresh ideas	Corporate models	No transparency
<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>				
Information overload/digital divide	Techno Slaves	Electronic Egalitarians	World Wide Web	Paper Tiger
<b>ECONOMIC</b>				
Fewer paying members	Patience	Profit and Productivity	Compete and cut all losses	Finances in limbo
<b>POLITICAL</b>				
NGOs/NPOs role in problem-solving	Participant-Observation	Anticipation	Observation	Theory and Analysis
International tensions/anti-Americanism	Silent Majority	Voice of Reason	Bandwagon	Flag Burners
To take a 'stand' on geopolitics (i.e., peace)	Responsive	Foreseeing	Forecasting	Prediction
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
More futures educators and students in higher education	Mentor-protégé	Collaborators	Hierarchy	Canon
Non-traditional education and work styles	Innovative	Experiential	Curriculum	Pedagogy
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>				
How to foster a new generation of futurists	Idols	Sages	Celebrities	Elders
How to connect a dispersed community of students and practitioners	Hub	Network	Bureaucracy	Protocol

#### **IV. Scenarios Alternative Futures Of Relationships**

What defines 'business as usual' in an organization or even isolation and remoteness considering the size and scope of WFSF? This scenario combines two of the alternative futures outlined in the matrix. Remote WFSF (Isolated and Insignificant) mixed in with Mainframe WFSF (Business as Usual) generates the one possible future for the Federation's relationships with Institutional Members.

*Returning to the campus he observed in amazement how little the Future Studies student lab had changed since 2003. The walls were still painted that depressing color as when he was an undergraduate here, that grimy public institution shade. Dusty books piled in the corner sent dust particles floating in the sunlight. Figures...no one at the University of Houston-Clear Lake had opened a Futures book in years now—it was all online now.*

*Like the paint, one thing seemed the same: twenty years later, the World Futures Studies Federation was again occupying the lab. Since 2003 several new futures organizations had appeared, but the WFSF remained as monolithic as ever in this obscure field. But after a semester working in the organization, he was starting to have doubts about the influence of the WFSF.*

*He flipped through a paper copy of the Futures Bulletin, the latest issue in fact, that someone had left out on a table. Book reviews, scenarios, an article on the history of Futures Studies and letters to the editor flooded the pages. Familiar Futurist faces smiled in the digital photos. The face of his professor (President of the Federation and responsible for the recent return of WFSF to the halls of UHCL) grinned alongside the usual conference companions. He did a quick double take at the walls again. The photos in the Bulletin held the same faces (only twenty years older) as those framed photos on the walls. And those were taken at the 2002 Japan conference!*

*At first he thought the internship with the Federation would be a ride on the fast track to a Futures career. However, it seemed like there were a small number of organizations associated with the WFSF, each of whom had filled their quota of professional Futurists. It seemed so hard to get out there and make it as a consultant on your own, especially if you're just starting out. If only he could find a job with one of the organizations, work on the inside for a while. But many of the Institutions who did have ongoing relationships with WFSF tended to be sort of on their last legs. Some hadn't paid dues in years. Others had fallen off the radar of the more active jet-set side of the organization, especially the President and Secretary General.*

*Unlike in 2003, members from developing countries were not granted special status now, but it was still a challenge for some of them to be involved in the futures community. Ever since political tensions created permanent damage among some of the personalities among the organization's core network, WFSF is in 2023 still mending wounds. Despite good standing as a UNESCO NGO, relationships between the American and non-American contingents of the Federation have only started to heal.*

*It seemed to have started with September 11, 2001, and escalated from there. He hoped to keep his own politics in check when he would observe this tension in closer quarters, during the upcoming World Conference to be held in Houston next week. The theme of the conference was "Participant Observation: An Ethnography of Experience in WFSF 1999-2019". The research was somewhat outdated, but he'd heard it was always a good time when the WFSF got together. Everyone's known everyone else forever and it's like a family reunion every two years. But the thing about families is that you're either born or married into one. So how does a middle aged Futurist find a path in such a narrow lineage?*

Scenarios are all relative. For some this next scenario is the worst-case, and for others it could be stirring. Hopefully, most reactions will involve a little of both. This story combines the success story of Networked WFSF (Interactive and Vital) with the constraints of the Generic Strategy, Default WFSF. The overall feel of this alternative future is that WFSF is user-friendly and popular. On the other hand, Futures processes have become somewhat trivialized and formulated for mass-consumption so income and mainstream visibility are priority. Regarded as a Generic Strategy in the parameters matrix, Default WFSF would broadly adopt established methods to achieve results. Corporate and bureaucratic systems are applied to the organization's aims in regard to Institutional Members (some of the concepts and products have even been copyrighted). But on the other hand, WFSF is making Futures materials available to schools, professionals and futurists around the world.

*WFSF Annual Report to Institutional Members  
December 17, 2027*

*Dear Members of the WFSF,*

*You all can imagine the year we've had at the World Futures Studies Federation© in 2027! As you know, our hard work at building the membership rolls that started over twenty years ago have, over the past several years, really started to pay off. All you futurists said it couldn't be done, but we've done it! Institutional Membership has now exceeded 15,000 members. Our strict policies at first scared some of you off, but those of you who have returned will share in our success in this Futures© endeavor.*

*As you may know, we now count among our Institutional Members nearly every public institute of higher education in the United States. Hundreds of elementary, secondary and high schools (private, public, charter and laboratory schools included) take advantage of our Institutional Member materials such as Make My Vision Workbooks©, Biography of a Futurist© book series, textbooks like Cut & Paste Scenarios© and Take Me To The Future© video instruction games. Hospitals, media conglomerates and banks continue to join in record numbers, so we are developing Virtual Scenario Building Consultations online (plug in a few variables and get instant results for three alternative futures), a custom Forecasting Kit for various business sectors, and futures coaching services with specially trained coaches for up and coming futurists within Institutions.*

*We certainly have come a long way from cranking out all those Institutional Members dues reminders! Only those organizations with paid memberships can take advantage of the toll-free Futurist Hotline and Telephone Counseling for Decision-Making. These services have been so invaluable to the futurists working at member Non-Profits and NGOs that we get thanks and acknowledgements in the numerous success stories posted to our Institutional Member's only web discussion board. You may have read that The American Lung Association attributes the intellectual breakthrough leading to the cure for lung cancer directly to a conference call/brainstorming session facilitated by some of our free-lance Institutional Futurists. It's not just a rumor.*

*On the business side, things are going great. As you know, the growth of the WFSF has been so significant that we've had to create a series of offices and positions to handle mass Institutional Membership over the years. In 2026 the notion of starting a sister corporation was developed and the first year of operations has been a complete success. The official transcript of the recent World*

*Futures Studies Federation Inc.'s board of directors, CEO, COO, and CFO meeting is posted on our website. Our decision to go public is still in the planning phase for 2030. We will keep you informed of upcoming changes, which are certain to be productive, lucrative and sustaining for the WFSF, WFSF Inc. and member institutions.*

*With Best Regards,*

*The President and Secretary General*

These are just two paths for the World Futures Studies Federation. Imagine that WFSF is at an actual fork in the road. In each scenario there are factors from more than one possible future taking place because we know there's no one single future out there waiting for us. Surely whatever route the Federation takes, it will confront the unknown. Quite possibly, it will confront a future that combines qualities from each of these four alternative futures.

## **V. Suggested Strategies: Mutually Beneficial Relationships**

Scenarios do not predict the future, but conceiving a handful of possibilities about what might happen can be a good point of reference for planning, depending on which approach WFSF take. Strategies should keep the mission of the organization in mind always. The integrity of Futures-oriented thinking should remain in tact (i.e., keeping future generations in mind) and WFSF should remain a democratic institution. The following suggestions are meant to enhance the influence and value of WFSF in relation to Institutional Members. Each strategy draws from all four alternative futures because it is important not to rule any one out entirely.

Reference in parentheses to **(individual matrix cell)**

### **▪ Students And Volunteers: Environmental Scanning, Data Collection, Reporting And Networking**

Students, staff and volunteers are already at the core of this organization, and the organizations with Institutional Membership (**Hierarchy**).

Students could be a better-utilized resource of manpower and ideas (**Collaborators**). They are also the ideal test market for new concepts, services and membership materials. Secondly, students of futures studies are as equally dispersed as their professional counterparts. Any effort to unite the social circles of student futurists—from undergrad to PhD—could influence the future of the profession immensely (**Mentor-protégé**).



A team of students, staff and volunteers would be well-suited to conduct environmental scanning to build a trend database for members (**Anticipation**). The information could be stored on a website and members given access/passwords. To benefit institutional members directly, the research group could post news items, press releases, updates, etc. on the organizations' activities (**World Wide Web**). This would improve the site and generate interest.

- **Web/Technology: Give Email Addresses, Web Space, On-Line Community**

The number of Institutional Members without email addresses or websites suggests a Digital Divide among the organizations. It could be productive to provide telecommunications services to qualified members (**Electronic Egalitarianism**). The cost of doing so would have to be covered by membership fees paid on time; perhaps if some members relied on WFSF for day-to-day services like email they would be more inclined to maintain current payments. On the other hand, WFSF could bear the cost of providing email to UNESCO members, qualified representatives of developing countries and non-profits as a response to the leveling disproportionate access to modern communications (**Profit and Productivity**).

- **Institutional Member Leadership Retreat, Institutional Member Gathering**

The cooperation of Institutional Members is critical to this particular strategy. The event could be by invitation only, or an addition to the regular World Conference agenda as an extra day/half-day (**Quality Members**). Hosting an event specifically for institutional members could rekindle the interest of some organizations, clarify the motives of others, and on the whole, a goodwill gesture on the WFSF's behalf to repair the dwindling relationships with member institutions (**Membership Static**). It would be a good idea to open the retreat to Potential Institutional Members as well—some individuals in the membership might come out of the woodwork as an Institution, or perhaps newcomers from the outside will take interest (**Experiential**).

- **Consulting, Job Postings, Mentorships, Futurist Exchange Program**

The goals of the federation could be met through more research projects and consulting work (**Strictly Applied**). This would also generate income and create more buzz around WFSF (**Celebrities**). Perhaps long-term effectiveness could be accomplished by connecting futures work with futures practitioners; jobs, resumes and opportunities might have a place on a user-friendly WFSF members-only site (**Network**). Students could benefit from a Mentorship program involving Institutions or WFSF Fellows

(**Mentor-protégé**) whereas the trans-disciplinary, trans-national, trans-generational divisions in the futures field could be crossed with a Futurist Exchange Program (**Sages**). WFSF might lead the process of familiarizing young/new futurists and futures organizations with outstanding firms through collaborative projects and conferences (**Experiential**). This might be particularly useful in initiating new members to the field, particularly those who do not have education or courses in futures studies, but wish to break into the field (**Participant-Observation**).