

# W.O.W Factor

## Words Of Wisdom for FPS Coaches and Students

### Choosing an Underlying Problem

Selecting an Underlying Problem (UP) is the most important step of the process as it gives direction to the rest of the booklet. Go wrong here and you will be off track for the steps that follow. So how should you decide on what your UP will be for a particular problem? Here are some tips!



#### The UP should stem from your list of challenges.

- It might be one specific challenge from Step 1 that you feel stands out as being really significant/important in itself given the Future Scene.
- It may stem from a number of your challenges. That is, solving a particular UP might help to take care of a number of the challenges you listed.
  - For example, suppose we are dealing with a Future Scene about the educational environment at XYZ school, and 5 of the challenges we cited dealt with bullying, teasing, cliques, talking back to teachers, and destroying others' belongings.
  - We might choose a Key Verb Phrase (KVP) of "How might we promote respect among the population at XYZ school. . ." If we could increase respect, it might do a great deal to reduce incidences of bullying, teasing, cliques, talking back to teachers teachers and destroying others' belongings.

#### Choose a UP that is narrowed. This is called focusing.

- You want a UP that is neither too broad/general or too trivial.
  - KVP that's too broad: How might we improve XYZ school?
    - Improve how? It's pretty unclear as to exactly what you want to do.
  - KVP that's too narrow: How might we get students to flush the toilets at XYZ school?
    - Given the scope of all of the issues at the school as described in the FS, this seems to be a fairly trivial issue.



#### Choose a UP that is adequate (important). This means that it is a significant issue that needs to be addressed given the information in the FS.

- Often, after the introductory paragraph of the FS, you can find a major issue being referred to in each of the major paragraphs that follow.
- As you read each paragraph, ask, "What is the big issue being described here?"



## Here's a chart that explains Focus and Adequacy more fully:

	High	Low
<p><b>Focus</b></p> <p>The scope of the UP &amp; whether it is manageable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear, manageable goal</li> <li>• Narrowed, but not trivial</li> <li>• Appropriately addresses the FS charge</li> <li>• Definite impact on the FS</li> <li>• Derived from challenge or cluster of challenges generated in Step 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vague, hard to manage/measure goal</li> <li>• Broad or trivial</li> <li>• Does not appropriately address FS charge</li> <li>• No significant impact on FS</li> <li>• Not derived from Step 1 challenge(s)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Adequacy</b></p> <p>Importance, significance &amp; merit of the UP &amp; its impact on the FS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate, significant issue/sub problem</li> <li>• Is a predictable, controllable concern</li> <li>• Makes no assumptions</li> <li>• Solving it will have positive impact on FS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue/sub-problem of low significance; not appropriate to FS</li> <li>• Not a predictable concern</li> <li>• Makes assumptions</li> <li>• Solving it does not impact the FS</li> </ul>

**Consider using the 4 I's test.** How well does the problem/challenge/issue you're thinking of using address the following?

- **I**nterest (for the team/individual)
- **I**mpact (on the situation described in the Future Scene)
- **I**nfluence (on the overall topic)
- **I**magination (allows the team/individual to be creative and move past the present)



### Ask yourselves, do we have the expertise to solve it?

- For example, suppose you choose a very technological problem/UP that may indeed be important to address. However, if you can't think of any solutions, choose something else.
- Before writing your UP see if each team member can think of at least 2 solutions. If not, choose a different UP.

### Some final tips:

- Evaluators often find that a team's purpose might have made a better KVP than the one that was actually chosen. If, when writing solutions you find this to be the case, change your UP.
- If, as you write up or proofread your solutions, you discover that you really aren't addressing your UP/KVP but are instead solving something else, go back and change your UP.
- As you do your research for a topic, look for the big ideas that need to be/are being addressed. Make a chart of these big ideas. Then practice developing each of them into an Underlying Problem.

**Good luck in your search for the ultimate Underlying Problem!**

