



# The Future: An Owner's Manual

**A brief overview of  
the study of the future  
and the services of the  
World Future Society.**

*"The world's greatest need is an appetite for the future. The sense of the future is behind all good policies. Unless we have it, we can give nothing either wise or decent to the world." –C.P. Snow, 1905–1980*

NASA GODDARD SFC IMAGE



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*“The person who does not worry about the future will shortly have worries about the present.”*

—Chinese proverb

*“Business, more than any other occupation, is a continual dealing with the future; it is a continual calculation, an instinctive exercise in foresight.”*

—Henry Luce, 1898–1967

*“The reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy . . . is foreknowledge.”*

—Sun Tzu, fourth century B.C.

## The Importance of the Future

To meet the challenges of the future, we need to find out what we can plausibly expect in the years ahead so we can understand what our options are. We can then set reasonable goals and develop effective strategies for achieving them.

Many people believe it is impossible to know anything about the future, so the future can simply be ignored. This is a very serious mistake. It’s true, of course, that we can know only a little about the future, but that little is extremely important, because a knowledge of the future—even when it’s very uncertain—is critical in making wise decisions, in both our professional and personal lives.

Learning what we can know about the future enables us to think constructively about it and do things that will contribute to our achieving a desirable future, because preparation is needed to meet the challenges of the future and take advantage of the new opportunities opening up.

We humans really do have the ability to think constructively about the future, anticipate many future events, envision desirable goals, and develop effective strategies for realizing our purposes. By learning about current trends and likely future developments, we can develop a mental data bank and set of blueprints for improving our future life. These assets can help us to succeed in whatever we seek to achieve.

Proactive, future-oriented thinking can lead to greater success in both work and private affairs. The future will happen, no matter what we do, but if we want it to be a good future, we need to work at it. As Adlai Stevenson put it, “Change is inevitable; change for the better is a full-time job.”

## A Time of Convulsive Change

Every crisis should be a reminder to us of the importance of thinking *now* about the future. A crisis almost always results from earlier failures to deal with an emerging problem or to anticipate a likely eventuality. In retrospect, we often recognize that the crisis was perfectly preventable.

The importance of thinking ahead is growing rapidly because the pace of change is accelerating. New technologies—such as the Internet and genetic engineering—are producing a cascade of economic and social changes in our lives and raising serious questions for politicians and ethicists.

We are now in a period of convulsive change, when almost everything seems to be coming unstuck: New technologies are also revolutionizing warfare and restructuring governments. Scandals rocking business and religion call into question people’s faith in institutions. Advances in science and technology are raising unsettling questions for people concerned about morality and ethics. The world’s population, already higher than ever before in history, continues to rise, along with the number of nations. Societies around the world are undergoing radical restructuring as people re-group in response to technological and economic shifts.

## How Can We Think Ahead?

Many people do not understand how it is possible to think realistically about the future, and clearly it is a challenging task. Still, futurists have refined scores of useful techniques to help us think ahead. Here are three examples:

- **Trend analysis** begins with the systematic collection of data concerning what is actually happening in the world around us; that is, measurable changes in such indicators as the number of elderly people, the standard of living, and atmospheric pollution. These measurements generally indicate a certain direction or trend, and we can make a crude forecast simply by extending the trend line into the future. For example, the current growth of world population makes it possible to estimate what the population may be 15 or 30 years from now. However, such projections become less

certain as we look farther out in time.

- **Precursor analysis** is based on the observation that many phenomena go through stages. For example, people go through a series of biological stages from conception through gestation to birth, infancy, childhood, and so on. Similar patterns may be seen in technological and social developments. By knowing the stages of such phenomena, we often can anticipate future developments.

- **Scenario analysis** enables us to think about alternative future developments. We can create a scenario—a series of possible future events showing how we expect our business to progress in the future. We can then create two additional scenarios—one assuming that revenues will be 20% *above* our current expectations and one assuming they will be 20% *below*. We can then consider what might result from each scenario.



## The Role of Futurists in Business

People in business study the future to identify potential new products and services, as well as markets for those products and services. Trend watchers also may identify potential threats to their industry and can prepare to deal with them before they become crises.

Restaurants, grocers, and other food-industry professionals study trends in demographics to assess who their customers are and what their dining habits are. An increase in minority populations in a neighborhood, for example, would lead a grocer to stock more foods linked to ethnic tastes. An increase in young, single professional workers or dual-income households—groups who feel pressed for time—might inspire grocers to offer more ready-to-eat meals.

“Leisure” industries such as tourism, sports, and the arts must gauge the public’s desire to spend time and money on various activities. Real estate markets fluctuate with demographic and economic shifts, which also have impacts on retail businesses, school systems, and local governments. The health-care industry, including insurance, is also directly affected by population trends, new technologies (including pharmaceuticals), and economic fluctuation.

## The Role of Futurists in Government and Policy Making

The public’s changing values and priorities, as well as emerging technologies, demographic shifts, economic constraints (or opportunities), and environmental and resource concerns, are all parts of the increasingly complex world system in which leaders must lead.

“Technology-related issues today besiege Congress across the range of committee responsibilities—stem-cell research and human cloning, missile defense, cellular telephones, genetically engineered foods, the Internet, and much more—because technology has become a central part of modern life,” according to technology-assessment expert Vary T. Coates (*THE FUTURIST*, September-October 2001).

Policy makers might commission reports from future-oriented researchers or task their own staff members to identify important trends. A scanning team for the Hawaiian government was credited for giving the governor an idea for a statewide after-school project and for inspiring the Hawaii Visitors Bureau to sponsor a conference on ecotourism (*THE FUTURIST*, May-June 1993).

School officials must also track trends in order to assess numbers of students to accommodate, numbers of teachers to hire, new educational technologies to deploy, and new skills for students (and their teachers) to develop (*THE FUTURIST*, March-April 2001).

## Top 10 Reasons To Watch Trends

World Future Society members recently explained why they study trends:

- 1. To get investment ideas and save money.** A group of “angel investors” reports finding new ideas by studying trends and reading World Future Society publications: “You have saved us money!”

- 2. To get early warnings.** Scanning the environment for emerging opportunities and crises is like looking both ways for traffic before crossing a busy road. It just makes sense.

- 3. To get confidence.** A solid foundation of awareness about trends can give you the confidence to take wise risks.

- 4. To get an edge on the competition.** Seeing what’s coming before others do can give you lead time to establish a foothold in a new market.

- 5. To get at the heart of a trend.** Analyzing the details within a trend can help separate truly significant developments from mere fads.

- 6. To get goals in balance.** Thinking about the future is an antidote to a “profit now, worry later” mentality that could lead to trouble in the long term.

- 7. To get informed on forces affecting your field.** Health-care planners, for instance, need to know what’s going on in biotech and medicine, values and public policy, labor supply and population aging.

- 8. To get informed on forces in many fields.** Educators, may follow trends in the economy to know how best to guide their students.

- 9. To get a glimpse of emerging futures.** A trend is a glance at potential futures; we can then take actions to turn those trends into opportunities.

- 10. To get yourself and others ready for the future.** Many futurists serve as consultants or counselors; they must keep abreast of trends not only for their own sake but also to help their clients.

*From “Top 10 Reasons to Watch Trends,” THE FUTURIST, March-April 2002.*

# The World Future Society: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing Future

The World Future Society is the world's largest and oldest organization devoted to the future. Founded on October 18, 1966, in Washington, D.C., the Society is a neutral clearinghouse for ideas and information about the future.

As a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization, the World Future Society is not beholden to any corporation, government agency, political party, or belief system. The Society takes no stand on what the future will or should be like, but rather provides a forum for the exchange of information and opinions about the future.

## Membership in the World Future Society

The Society currently has approximately 30,000 members in some 80 countries. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in the trends shaping the future.

- **Regular membership** includes annual subscriptions to THE FUTURIST magazine, the electronic newsletter *Futurist Update*, and the tabloid-style periodical *Future Times*, as well as discounts on books offered through the Futurist Bookstore and on registration fees for the Society's annual meetings.
- **Professional members** also receive a subscription to the Society's scholarly journal *Futures Research Quarterly* and the latest edition of *The Futurist Directory*, for which they are invited to submit their own biographical information to be included in the next edition. Professional members are also invited to attend exclusive Forums held in conjunction with the Society's annual meetings. These daylong events allow professional futurists in business, government, and academia to exchange valuable tools, resources, and insights on the study of the future.
- **Comprehensive professional membership** adds a subscription to the esteemed *Future Survey*, a monthly journal that offers abstracts of the latest books, articles, and reports about the future.
- **Institutional membership** is also available for libraries and other organizations wishing to make membership benefits available to several individuals. Institutional members receive copies of all publications produced by the Society during the course of their membership term, and they are offered special assistance in locating sources of information or contacts related to their organization's needs and interests. Institutional members also receive special recognition each year in THE FUTURIST magazine.

## Publications

The World Future Society now publishes five periodicals (see below). In addition, the Society has published books in conjunction with selected General Assemblies, directories of professional members, resource guides, and anthologies of articles.

- **THE FUTURIST:** This colorful, bimonthly magazine began in 1967 as an offset newsletter and is now a principal benefit of membership in the Society. Each issue features articles written by experts in a wide range of fields—workplace issues, criminal justice, social change, nanotechnology, virtual reality, peace strategies, space exploration, ocean research, and much more.

THE FUTURIST also covers World Trends & Forecasts in the six sectors of the "macroenvironment": Demography, Economics, Environment, Government, Society,



## The World Future Society: A Chronology

- 1966** The Society is founded in Washington, D.C., and is chartered by the District of Columbia government as a nonprofit scientific and educational organization.
- 1967** The Society begins publishing THE FUTURIST as a newsletter.
- 1968** First chapters are established in Los Angeles and Minneapolis.
- 1969** The U.S. Internal Revenue Service recognizes the World Future Society as a nonprofit charitable organization, allowing donations to be deducted on U.S. income tax returns.
- 1971** First general meeting of Society members at Washington Hilton.
- 1974** U.S. Vice President Gerald Ford speaks at Society's special conference on energy issues. Society's first book (dealing with energy) is published for conference members.
- 1975** The U.S. National Science Foundation and Library of Congress give the Society a grant for a report on the study of the future.
- 1977** The Society submits to sponsors its two-volume report, *Resources Directory for America's Third Century*.
- 1979** *Future Survey*, a monthly journal of abstracts, is established.
- 1980** Canada's Governor-General opens Society conference in Toronto, the first held outside the United States.
- 1985** A scholarly journal, *Futures Research Quarterly*, is established.
- 1988 and 1990** Professional Members' Forums are held at the Futures Library in Salzburg, Austria.

**1992** Society's offices moved to modern office building in Bethesda, Maryland.

Collaborates with Smithsonian Institution on a lecture series.

**1993** Society assists United Nations Development Programme in establishing an Africa Futures project. A directory of organizations in the futures field is published.

**1995** Web site ([www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)) is established.

**1996** President Clinton commends the Society's members "for working with vision and energy to develop creative strategies for fulfilling the Promise of the future."

Jenifer Altman Foundation gives Society grant for an environmental bibliography.

**1997** Society forms an International Council. Among the early members are Sir Arthur C. Clarke (Sri Lanka) and Alvin and Heidi Toffler.

The first issue of *Future Times*, an occasional newspaper, is published.

**1998** The Nathan Cummings Foundation gives the Society a grant for its special conference on the Year 2000 computer problem.

**2000** Electronic newsletter, *Futurist Update*, is launched.

Forums on Social Innovation, Opportunities, and Wisdom are started on the Web site.

**2001** Society responds to September 11 attacks by putting on its Web site nearly 40 essays commenting on terrorism and the responses to it. The site was included in the Library of Congress's September 11 Web Archive.

**2002** The Society now has 117 chapters in 39 nations.

and Technology. The framework is designed to help focus attention on specific aspects of larger trends, such as the economics of an aging population or the social impacts of technological innovations.

Other regular features include Tomorrow in Brief, book reviews, Visions essays, Consultants and Services listings, and Future View editorials.

- **Future Survey:** Each issue of this monthly journal features 50 abstracts of the most important recent books, articles, and reports on the future, organized into major themes such as energy, society, cities, health, education, globalization, governance, work, environment, science and technology, and change and uncertainty.



Edited since 1979 by Michael Marien, a gifted professional futurist and social scientist, *Future Survey* distills the key ideas in each work and then gives readers a bottom-line assessment: Is it worth your time to read that article? Is it worth your money to buy this book? In an age of information overload, no serious reader of futures literature can live without *Future Survey*.

- **Futures Research Quarterly:** This professional journal is referred by a distinguished board of editors from around the world. Each issue includes thoroughly researched and referenced papers offering new techniques and perspectives contributing to the successful practice of futures research. The journal also publishes occasional responses to articles, as well as book reviews, news of interest to futurists, and other features.



Edited by professional futurist and consultant Timothy Mack, the *Quarterly* has devoted recent editions to special topics such as scenario planning, futures research in business planning and management, and long-range views of the war on terrorism.

- **Futurist Update:** This monthly newsletter is sent by e-mail to all members who supply their e-mail address. In addition to late-breaking news from the World Future Society, the *Update* offers a selection of interesting and useful stories culled from a variety of sources. Each issue also features a "Click of the Month"—a featured Web site with uniquely valuable and interesting information or resources for futurists.

- **Future Times:** An occasional tabloid newspaper distributed to members, providing information about Society activities as well as feature stories and interviews, a directory of chapter coordinators, and a book catalog with selections from the Futurist Bookstore.

## World Future Society Conferences

They've been described as "world's fairs of ideas," "the greatest intellectual shows on earth," and "a global village in microcosm." World Future Society meetings are open to all members and are perhaps the most stimulating and rewarding of all the Society's membership benefits.

Unlike reading journals or books, or even visiting the Society's Web site, attending a conference allows you to meet other futurists, exchange ideas with experts, ask vital questions, explore new fields of interest, and collect fresh insights on a wide variety of topics, all in a relaxed yet invigorating environment.

The conferences offer several tracks, such as health, business, education, creativity, environment and energy, values and religion, science and technology, and international perspectives. Organizers have found that these tracks help participants select the sessions they're most interested in, but "cross-tracking" can also be highly rewarding.

Society conferences are also an opportunity for special-interest groups to meet, and they often identify or organize session tracks in the program especially for their members. At the 2001 meeting in Minneapolis, for instance, groups organizing tracks



JEFFERSON CORNISH

included the WFS Mexican Chapter, Police Futurists International, Communities of the Future, the Millennium Project, the University of Houston–Clear Lake, and the Women as Futurists group.

The opportunity to meet other like-minded people each year is one of the many intangible rewards of the World Future Society’s annual meetings. “I don’t know what I’d do in the summers without WFS,” said longtime member and contributor Bob Chernow. “I’d have to go fishing or something.”

*“The past is gone. We are powerless to alter it. Why should we remain slaves to its tyranny? The future is another matter. It is an open field of possibility. With forgiveness and forgetting, humanity can usher in the dawn of hope for all of Earth’s people. Such a change of mind, will, and heart could give rise to a universal ethical code honored and respected by all.”*

—Howard F. Didsbury Jr., editor of *Frontiers of the 21st Century*

*“Our greatest responsibility is to be good ancestors.”*

—Jonas Salk, 1914–1995

### The Futurist Bookstore

Almost since its beginning, the Society has made it easy for members to order books that are of special interest to futurists. Members of the Society receive discounts of approximately 10% on books, videos, and other products sold through the Futurist Bookstore.

Some of these books, like *Foundations of Futures Studies* or *Utopian Thinking in Sociology*, are extremely hard to find in even the best local bookstores. Though specialized, these books are carefully selected by the Society’s editors for their suitability for a general, well-educated audience.

The Society has also established a partnership with Amazon.com to make featured books easily available. Any book that is mentioned in THE FUTURIST, or books by authors featured in the magazine, may be ordered through the Society Web site’s “Special Futurist Books” page. Books ordered from Amazon through this site will produce a small commission for the Society—an easy way to support the Society and get the book you want.

### Chapters

The World Future Society is both global and local, with chapters on six continents in nearly 120 cities. Local chapters organize a variety of activities, including debates, meet-the-author sessions, and trips to research institutes or other places of interest to members. In 2001, the Oslo chapter organized a seminar on the future of money. The Washington, D.C., chapter co-sponsored a symposium on the future of analysis. And the Indonesian chapter organized a weekend retreat/conference on the challenges of the Information Age.

Chapters may also publish their own newsletters; the Minnesota Futurists, the Society’s oldest continuously active chapter, publishes the newsletter *Future Trends* and *Futurics*, a quarterly journal of futures research.

Chapter members are also extremely active in planning World Future Society conferences when they come to town. Chapters in Minneapolis, Boston, San Francisco, Houston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Atlanta became talent scouts for the Society, contacting local experts to participate in the meetings and thus broadening the range of ideas the Society is able to offer.



### The World Future Society Web Site, [www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)

Nowhere is the principle of “continuous improvement” better demonstrated than on the World Future Society’s Web site. New features are constantly being added, and the site made easier to navigate. The homepage is your first stop for basic information about the Society (such as the address and telephone number), with a

complete site-map menu on the opening page.

Among the special features of the site are links to Consultants and Services and to Chapter Coordinators; Forums on Global Strategies, Social Innovations, the Cyber Society, Utopias, Wisdom, and Opportunities; Interviews with prominent futurists; and thought-provoking Forecasts gleaned from the current issue of THE FUTURIST. Also, a special section on the threats of terrorism—inaugurated within hours of the September 11 attacks—has built up a collection of insightful essays.

Thanks to the unique character of the Web, the Society can always answer members' questions, and stimulate their thinking about the future, 24/7.

### How the Society Is Supported

The World Future Society depends heavily on the generous support of members and friends who have donated both their time and money to sustain our programs.

Speakers on Society programs, scholars writing in our publications, distinguished leaders on our board, and officers in chapters contribute their services without financial remuneration or even reimbursement of expenses. In addition, many members make periodic contributions of funds or include the Society in their wills.

This ongoing support is essential if the Society is to maintain its programs and begin to address the critical need to make its services available to underserved communities, such as young people and people in the developing nations.

The Society is currently trying to raise funds to establish a Web-based guide to information sources on trends, forecasts, and ideas about the future. The proposed *World FutureGuide* will make it possible for people around the world—teachers, students, government officials, and others—to have easy, cost-free access to basic information about what's happening in our world today and where it may lead in the future. This

tool—if the Society receives adequate funds for it—could be an outstanding contribution to the world's future.

Anyone interested in contributing to the Society may contact Susan Echard or Anne Silk at the Society (info@wfs.org) or Kenneth W. Harris (harriskw@erols.com), who is coordinating fund-raising for *World FutureGuide*. Donations are tax-deductible in the United States.

## Extra Copies

Additional copies of "The Future: An Owner's Manual" may be requested from Society headquarters while supplies last.

### Yes! I would like to join the World Future Society.

Membership Level*	One Year	Two Years	Lifetime
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> \$45	<input type="checkbox"/> \$78	<input type="checkbox"/> \$700
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional	<input type="checkbox"/> \$118	<input type="checkbox"/> \$205	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,750
<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive Professional	<input type="checkbox"/> \$225	<input type="checkbox"/> \$395	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2,950
<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional, for-profit	<input type="checkbox"/> \$450	<input type="checkbox"/> \$800	
<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional, nonprofit	<input type="checkbox"/> \$275	<input type="checkbox"/> \$495	

\* Benefits as listed on page 4. All new members receive an attractive kit containing several special reports from the Society.

- I would also like to support the World Future Society with a tax-deductible donation of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_.
- Enclosed is my check or money order for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (payable to **World Future Society**; Maryland residents must include 5% sales tax).
- Please charge my  
 VISA  MasterCard  Discover  Am. Express  Diner's Club

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP/Country \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime telephone \_\_\_\_\_

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Or Join online! [www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)

C.G. WAGNER / WFS



Multitalented science writer Isaac Asimov (right) with World Future Society President Edward Cornish. Asimov received the Society's life achievement award in 1986.

# Friends of the World Future Society

SCOTT FOOTE / WFS



Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock*, speaks at a Society conference.

ELLEN DUDLEY / WFS



Actress Ellen Burstyn participates at the Society's Assembly on the future of Communications.

The Society has been supported over the years by the generous contributions of time and money from its members and friends. The Society's authors and speakers share their work and insights with no financial compensation. Among them: inventor R. Buckminster Fuller; writers Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Alvin Toffler, Gene Roddenberry, and Frederik Pohl; political leaders Gerald R. Ford, Al Gore Jr., Newt Gingrich, Edward M. Kennedy, Hubert H. Humphrey, and Richard Lamm; scientists Carl Sagan, Glenn T. Seaborg, B.F. Skinner, and Ray Kurzweil; and countless other scholars, business leaders, and researchers, such as feminist Betty Friedan, anthropologist Margaret Mead, actress Ellen Burstyn, media theorist Marshall McLuhan, architect Aurelio Peccei, and futurism's great pioneers, Herman Kahn, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and Robert Jungk.

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B.F. Skinner, author of *Walden Two*.

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Future Vice President Al Gore Jr. at a Society conference.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

—Margaret Mead, 1901–1978

ROSS SUTTON FOR WORLD FUTURE SOCIETY



Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, addresses a World Future Society conference.



Ray Kurzweil, author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines*.



Futurist pioneer Herman Kahn and anthropologist Margaret Mead.