



FUTURE NOW: DISCUSSION/TEACHING GUIDE

LAF's **Future Now: Taking Action for People + Planet by Design** summit brought together the landscape architecture community to share ideas and tools, scale actions, and deepen our resolve to shape the future we want to see despite the mounting challenges. Over the course of two days encompassing lightning talks, keynote speakers, workshops, and panels, this convening affirmed the power of collective leadership and collaboration to drive meaningful change.

The recordings are an accessible way to tap into the ideas and momentum from the summit, whether you are looking to stay at the forefront of current issues and discourse or engage in critical conversations about how to show up in this moment.

This discussion guide offers suggestions for how to use the recordings as professional development and team building activities, as classroom assignments, or as opportunities for individual reflection.

Content:

- 29 recorded lightning talks (~10 minutes each)
- 5 recorded keynote presentations (20-35 minutes each)

Audience:

- Landscape architecture professionals
- Graduate landscape architecture students
- Undergraduate landscape architecture students

Content Groupings:

The following pages contain 5 options for content groupings. Each lists specific videos to watch or choose from, followed by a set of corresponding discussion questions. The options range from 1 to 4 hours of total time and can be completed in 1 to 3 sessions.

Suggested Uses:

- Watch together and discuss
- Watch on own and hold group discussion
- Watch on own and reflect through written responses to the questions

For faculty incorporating the Future Now recordings into a class or studio course, the videos may be viewed together during class time or assigned as homework for students to view on their own. The questions can be used as prompts for class or small group discussions or assigned for students to produce written responses.

Intended Outcomes

- 1) Critically evaluate emerging issues and approaches in landscape architecture.
- 2) Compare multiple professional perspectives on values-centered themes.
- 3) Recognize the importance of values-driven practice and its potential to create meaningful change.
- 4) Apply ideas from the presentations to real-world challenges through everyday actions.

Option 1: Showing Up in This Moment

Suggested time: 2 sessions or classes

- Keynote: 20-minute video + 25-40 minutes of reflection or discussion
- 3-4 Lightning Talks: 30-45 minutes of video + 30-45 minutes of reflection or discussion

Suggested audience: Design professionals, graduate students

First, participants watch Alexa Bush's 19-minute keynote talk [Why Detroit? Why Now?](#) as context for the lightning talks as a set of ideas and examples intended to be catalysts for meaningful action.

To consider or discuss:

- What is your "North Star" right now? (What values, goals, or commitments help guide you when circumstances are uncertain or discouraging?)
- What obstacles or setbacks have challenged your sense of purpose recently?
- What is one value, idea, or mission that you feel called to protect or advance right now?
- Alexa challenged the audience to broaden their understanding of resistance and change-making. What examples do you see of this "underground" work in your own organization or the larger community?
- Where do you find hope when progress feels slow or invisible?
- After hearing this talk, what is one thing (big or small) that you feel inspired to do differently?

Then, participants review the list of 29 lightning talk recordings and choose any 3-4 to watch on their own or together as a group. Everyone can watch the same 3-4 talks or each participant can choose the talks that most interest them. The complete list of talks with links to the individual recordings can be found at: www.lafoundation.org/big-ideas/future-now-summit/schedule

To consider or discuss:

- Which talk challenged your assumptions or expanded your thinking the most? Why?
- What idea, example, or call to action felt most relevant to your current work, studies, community, or personal interests?
- Across the talks, what did you notice about how change happens and the things needed to drive meaningful progress?
- Were there any tensions or tradeoffs raised by the talks you watched? How might those be navigated?
- What is one realistic action or specific step you could take as a result of something you learned?
- Looking five years into the future, what change would you most like to see if the ideas in the talks were widely embraced? In ten years?

Option 2: Action Areas

Suggested time: 1-3 sessions or classes

- 3-4 lightning talks per action area: 30-45 minutes of video + 30-45 minutes of reflection or discussion

Suggested audience: Design professionals, graduate students, undergraduate students

The Future Now summit was organized around 8 action areas: (1) Up Your Game, (2) Design with Purpose, (3) Prove It, (4) Walk the Talk, (5) Partner, Partner, Partner, (6) Future Proof, (7) Use Your Voice, and (8) Imagine. The action areas represent a broad framework for translating aspirational concepts into tangible actions, empowering individuals and organizations to identify ways to put their values into practice and contribute to meaningful change.

A page for each action area with an overview and its recorded lightning talks can be found at: www.lafoundation.org/resources/category/future-now-summit-recordings

The complete list of all lightning talks and presenters, grouped by action area, can be found at: www.lafoundation.org/big-ideas/future-now-summit/schedule

Participants choose an action area, read the overview, and then watch the 3-4 lightning talks that were presented at the summit under this action area. This activity can be done multiple times for different action areas. The same action area can be used by all participants, or if watching independently, each may choose a different action area.

Two of the action areas – Walk the Talk and Use Your Voice – were broadcast during a webinar which included a discussion and audience Q&A with the presenters. These can be viewed to earn 1.0 PDH (LA CES/HSW) and 1.25 PDH (LA CES/HSW), respectively, following successful completion of a short quiz. The recordings and quizzes can be accessed at: www.lafoundation.org/resources/2026/06/future-now-webcast-discussion

To consider or discuss:

- What was the central message or call to action from each of the presentations in your chosen action area?
- What common themes, connections, or complementary perspectives did you notice across the presentations within your action area?
- What, if any, tensions or tradeoffs did you notice across the presentations within your action area?
- What actions are you or your firm, school, or organization already taking that reflect the priorities described in this action area? Where do you see opportunities to do more?
- Based on the presentations you watched, what do you think is the most important issue or opportunity for landscape architects to address right now? How might design practice or education need to change to do this effectively?
- Which idea presented seemed most actionable or achievable? Conversely, which idea would be the most challenging to achieve? Why?
- How did the presentations challenge or expand your understanding of the role of landscape architecture today?
- What challenge or opportunity did the speakers identify that is most relevant to your current work, studies, or community?

Option 3: Imagining and Shaping the Future

Suggested time: 2 sessions or classes

- *Keynote: 30-minute video + 15-30 minutes of reflection or discussion*
- *Keynote: 35-minute video + 25-40 minutes of reflection or discussion*

Suggested audience: Design professionals, graduate students

Participants watch two keynote presentations that focus on shifting possibilities, one that argues that the true role of designers is to be facilitators of civic change and one that focuses on the personal transformation needed to be a leader for societal change:

- **Seeding Civic Futures** - Cézanne Charles (29:46)
- **Now What?** - Lucinda Sanders (34:00)

To consider or discuss after watching Seeding Civic Futures:

- How did this talk challenge your understanding of what designers or creative professionals can and should do?
- In landscape architecture generally or your particular work, what assumptions about the future are taken for granted? Which should be questioned?
- In landscape architecture, who usually defines the problems that need solving? Where are opportunities for designers to reshape or expand the conversation?
- What positive future in your work, school, community, or the landscape architecture profession feels "under-imagined" today?
- What would it mean to approach your own work or career as a contribution to a more equitable civic future?

To consider or discuss after watching Now What?:

- How does this talk change the way you think about leadership or success?
- What is one "I wonder why...?" question you have about your work, organization, community, or the landscape architecture discipline? What is the corresponding "I wonder if...?" question that opens up new possibilities?
- What does "holding space" for others look like in your own work, school, or personal life?
- What "better future" do you feel called to help create?
- If you could identify one takeaway from this talk to put into practice immediately, what would it be and why?

To consider or discuss after watching both presentations:

- What skills or perspectives do you think are most important for facilitating change, rather than directing it?
- Which do you think is more difficult: changing systems or changing ourselves? Why?
- How might your work change if you saw yourself primarily as a facilitator rather than a problem-solver?
- What is one question about the future that you are now asking differently?
- What is one idea from these talks that resonated with you most, and what action could you take to put that idea into practice?

Option 4: The Responsibility of Design

Suggested time: 2 sessions or classes

- *Keynote: 25-minute video + 20-35 minutes of reflection or discussion*
- *Keynote: 15-minute video + 30-45 minutes of reflection or discussion*

Suggested audience: Design professionals, graduate students, undergraduate students

Participants watch two keynote presentations that challenge designers to rethink their role and responsibilities in society. One calls for an expanded role that includes advocacy, community power-building, and systems change, while the other explores care as a practice and asks what it means to remain committed to equity, justice, and public well-being in the face of challenge and uncertainty:

- **A Just Horizon - The Opportunity and Responsibility of Design in This Moment and Beyond** - Chelina Odibert (25:07)
- **Are You Still Down? Solidarity in Design** - Ujiji Davis Williams and Matt Williams (13:24)

To consider or discuss after watching A Just Horizon:

- How might landscape architecture practice and education change if being an advocate, organizer, or power-broker were considered as fundamental as being a designer?
- What challenges in your work or community cannot be solved one project at a time? What would it look like to address them at a systems, policy, or regional scale?
- What would it mean to move beyond community input and toward genuine community decision-making power? Have you seen or experienced examples of this?
- What is one standard practice, professional norm, or assumption that should be reconsidered if the goal were greater equity, inclusion, or community power?
- What questions should design teams ask before considering a project complete? How should we define success beyond the physical built project?

To consider or discuss after watching Are You Still Down:

- What does "designing with care" look like in tangible, day-to-day decisions within your work?
- How can the role of design move from reacting to obvious harms and urgent challenges to proactively supporting care, health, and human dignity?
- What are some ways we can continue practicing care, equity, and public responsibility when funding, institutional priorities, or public opinion push in a different direction?
- How do you balance professional obligations, client expectations, and personal values when they come into conflict?

To consider or discuss after watching both presentations:

- For landscape architects to embrace the expanded roles and responsibilities outlined in these talks, what new skills, partnerships, or approaches will be most important moving forward?
- How are care and community power connected? What systems, processes, or habits could help embed them more consistently into design practice?
- What impacts should matter most five or ten years after a project is completed?
- What are the biggest barriers to aligning our work with our values? How can we sustain a long-term commitment to those values even when the work becomes difficult or unsupported?
- What is one way you could expand your own practice, teaching, or learning to better reflect the ideas and values discussed in these talks?

Option 5: Lightning Talks by Topic

Suggested time: 1-3 sessions or classes

- *3-4 lightning talks per topic: 30-45 minutes of video + 30-45 minutes of reflection or discussion*

Suggested audience: Design professionals, graduate students, undergraduate students

While the lightning talks at the Future Now summit were organized into 8 action areas, a number of key topics and themes were addressed across multiple talks. Therefore, the talks can also be grouped and watched by topic.

Below we've grouped some of the lightning talks by topic, but many other combinations exist. Facilitators can choose to use the groupings below or create other groupings of 3-4 talks based on the talk titles or presenters. This activity can be done multiple times for different topics or groupings.

The complete list of all lightning talks and presenters, grouped by action area, can be found at: www.lafoundation.org/big-ideas/future-now-summit/schedule

The complete list of presenters with bios and links to their talks can be found at: www.lafoundation.org/big-ideas/future-now-summit/speakers

General questions to consider or discuss:

- What was the core message or call to action from each of the presentations you watched?
- How do the presentations challenge traditional assumptions about the role and responsibilities of landscape architects?
- How do these presentations encourage us to think differently about who or what design serves?
- Which ideas feel most urgent today, and which seem most important for the long-term future of the profession?
- What is one insight from the talks that you want to continue exploring or learning more about?
- How might the ideas presented influence the way you approach your work, teaching, studies, or leadership moving forward?
- What is one concrete action you could take in the next six months that reflects an idea, value, or approach discussed in these presentations?

Some Potential Groupings

Climate Adaptation and Resilience

- [Why Levees Won't Keep Rising Seas from Flooding Coastal Cities](#) - Kristina Hill
- [Coastal Legacy: The Case for Graceful Retreat](#) - Sarai Carter
- [Reading the Low-Carbon Landscape](#) - Jonah Susskind
- [Miyawaki in Detroit: Community Forestry and Climate Resilience](#) - Fai Foen

Equity, Justice, and Representation

- [Design Isn't Neutral: AI Infrastructure and the Landscapes We Choose](#) - Kendra Hyson
- [PrideScapes: Documenting, Preserving, and Uplifting Queer Landscapes](#) - Max Dickson
- [Landscape as Refuge: Care, Comfort, or Exclusion?](#) - Fiwasewa Ogundipe
- [Equitable Outcomes in Detroit's Underserved Urban Landscapes](#) - Charles Cross

Indigenous Knowledge and Culture

- **A Call to Reflection: What if We Practice as Relatives?** - Aiman Duckworth
- **Designing Biocultural Futures: Cultivating Youth Storytelling and TEK in Landscape** - Jade Rhodes
- **Designing in Kinship** - Christina Contreras

Biodiversity and More-Than-Human Design

- **Little Things That Run the World: Designing Insect Biodiversity** - Gena Wirth
- **Including Animals: Co-creating with Our More-Than-Human Neighbors** - Roxi Thoren
- **Plants as Inventors** - Catherine Seavitt
- **Towards a Living Landscape** - Aaron Hernandez

Broadening Roles and Responsibilities

- **Influence, Economics, and the Necessity of Advocacy** - Jonathon Geels
- **Landscape Architects Need to Be Thinking about One Health** - Leann Andrews
- **Ethically Sourcing: Investigating Landscape Architects' Responsibility to Specify Forced Labor Free Materials** - Jeb Polstein
- **Inspiring the Next Generation of Federal Conservation and Recreation Grants** - David Goldstein

Rethinking Practice

- **Unlike Any Other Place: A Call for Regionally Specific Practice** - Nina Chase
- **Landscape Architecture in the Rural Industrial Environment** - Carl Rogers, Heidi Hohmann, Hans Klein-Hewett
- **Civic Empathy and Landscape of Care** - Taewook Cha
- **A Call to Reflection: What if We Practice as Relatives?** - Aiman Duckworth

Reimagining Futures

- **From the Mountaintop: Inventing Futures towards Actionable Goals** - Marc Miller
- **Designing a Mega-eco Project: An Example from Dakar, Senegal** - Robert Levinthal
- **Towards a Living Landscape** - Aaron Hernandez

Communication, Storytelling, and Visualization

- **Cinematic Tools for Climate-Literate Landscapes** - Evan Mather
- **Art as Preview: Installations for Hopeful Adaptation** - Carolina Aragón
- **Revealing Care and Neglect in Legacy Cities through AI** - Jianxing Guan
- **Designing Biocultural Futures: Cultivating Youth Storytelling and TEK in Landscape** - Jade Rhodes

Connecting People to Place

- **Sensorium: In Pursuit of Wonder through Embodied Design** - Nate Cormier
- **Unlike Any Other Place: A Call for Regionally Specific Practice** - Nina Chase
- **Landscape as Refuge: Care, Comfort, or Exclusion?** - Fiwasewa Ogundipe
- **Civic Empathy and Landscape of Care** - Taewook Cha