

IMAG40 – COMMUNITY BENEFIT STATEMENT

BACKGROUND FOR HOPE INC. (AUSTRALIA'S) IMAG40 PODCAST PROJECT (FOR RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP/GRANT FUNDING APPLICATIONS)

IMAGINING 2040: PATHWAYS TO FLOURISHING FUTURES (IMAG40)

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For: Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc. (Australia)

COMMUNITY BENEFIT STATEMENT

Imagining 2040: Pathways to Flourishing Futures (IMAG40) – will be a podcast experiment with a core objective of helping to strengthen the exercise of public imagination and advocacy for better development pathways out to 2040 and beyond. This will also be an experiment in contributing to what foresight thinker Riel Miller has termed 'future literacy.'

The *Imagining 2040: Pathways to Flourishing Futures* podcast series will also be an experiment in assessing the capacity of a digital audio public square to help activate and democratise the public imagination in service of building more socially inclusive, economically fairer, climate-safer, and ecologically flourishing futures.

At its heart, this project recognises that a key barrier to progressive and ecologically sustainable development lies not only in technical constraints or political will, but in a pervasive public and social imagination deficit (Mulgan, 2022).

There is a widespread public inability or disempowerment to think proactively and collectively about what better, climate safer properly environmentally protected, more socially and economically just futures could look like – or to visualise the possible pathways to achieve them. Without active cultivation of public imagination for better, alternative future development approaches those approaches will continue to be shaped by those with the most power, wealth, and access to narrative control.

Research increasingly shows that societies lacking a compelling collective vision of the future are less likely to break with maladaptive, business-as-usual development patterns and are more susceptible to repeating past mistakes (Sardar, 2010; Miller, 2018). As scholar and foresight practitioner Riel Miller notes, the capacity to imagine different futures is a foundational aspect of what he terms "*future literacy*", a skill essential for navigating complex 21st-century challenges. Cultivating imagination is not a luxury—it is a political necessity and a democratic responsibility.

However, most members of the public today have limited opportunities or inclination to imagine alternative development trajectories beyond dominant paradigms. For a start, there is a lack of accessible, creative platforms that help people envision futures that are:

- climate-resilient

- nature-protective
- socially inclusive
- economically fair and equitable
- and democratically participatory

This podcast aims to contribute to help address identified critical public imagination gap by inviting diverse voices into imaginative conversations about 2040 and beyond. It will showcase hopeful, evidence-based possibilities, while engaging listeners in envisioning their own roles in shaping these futures. This is vital, because without an increase in public imagination, it is less likely there will be sufficient political and institutional demands to do development differently, and prevailing systems—often marked by ecological degradation, economic inequality, and democratic disconnection—will continue unchecked (Wright, 2010).

By offering thought-provoking narratives, expert interviews, and simple, imaginative future foresight tools *Imagining 2040: Pathways to Flourishing Futures* (IMAG40) aims to:

- Enhance future literacy across community members and grassroots groups.
- Stimulate civic participation by helping people visualise themselves as agents of change.
- Counter apathy and despair by presenting stories of positive transformation grounded in real-world examples.
- Strengthen community cohesion through shared exploration of future possibilities

In doing so, the podcast aims to contribute to help building capacity for transformative public engagement that supports policy innovation, participatory governance, and community-led development. This aligns with the growing recognition across policy, education, and sustainability fields that imagination is not a luxury—it is a public good and a catalyst for systemic change (Manzini, 2015; Fisher, 2020).

The project will experiment with the use of a companion website to amplify stories of change and generate audience feedback for future design of the series as it evolves. Such interactive elements are aimed at trying to ensure that public imagination is not just sparked, but mobilised.

Ultimately, *Imagining 2040: pathways to flourishing futures* seeks to benefit the community by creating a digital space to help explore radical hope, increased community agency, and stronger citizen potential to help shape better futures—increasing the probability that we can still create development pathways towards the long-term flourishing of people, place, and planet.