Our Futures

Instructions booklet

Our Futures

A game to imagine new ways of involving people in thinking about the future.

Game overview

How could mass involvement with shaping the future solve complex problems?

Too often decisions about our future are left to a small group of experts in big companies, academia or governments. Participatory futures are methods for mobilising large numbers of people in thinking about the futures they want. This game is based on Nesta's *Our Futures: by the people, for the people* report – which provides an overview of these approaches, and why they can help us make better decisions in the present.

As the need to involve citizens in rethinking the future becomes more pressing, this game is designed to stimulate ideas for more creative and engaging ways to have those conversations. Our aim is to encourage more innovation in the fields of public engagement and participatory futures. We particularly want to enable people to think about how emerging technologies could be used to help democratise futures thinking and unlock social imagination.

Who is the game for?

The *Our Futures* game can be played by anyone wanting to dream up new, more engaging, ways to involve large groups of people in thinking about the future. It will be particularly relevant for futures professionals, artists, designers and technologists, as well as anyone with responsibility for engaging or consulting the public.

Key questions throughout the game are – how might emerging technologies be used in combination with participatory futures approaches and how might they help us find new ways to involve citizens in tackling 21st century challenges?

Let your imagination run wild and don't focus too much on plausibility.

Game purpose

Our Futures acknowledges that we will not be able to address 21st century challenges using 20th century mindsets and traditional models of public engagement. The game is meant to inspire and provoke new, and sometimes unusual, ways to unlock public imagination about alternative futures. Players compete to devise scenarios for new types of participatory futures activities that combine emerging technologies and a focus on tackling 21st century challenges, such as biodiversity loss or extreme weather events. At the end, the player or team with the most votes for their participatory futures activity wins the game. As with other tools and methods, *Our Futures* can and should be adapted to your local context and goals.

> **Players:** Three to five individuals, or three to five teams of three people each. Plus one facilitator to oversee the game.

> **Time:** 30–75 minutes

Setup and materials needed

> **The game board:** Each player / team gets one board.

> **Six sided dice:** Each player / team should have one.

> **Paper and pens to take notes**

> **A timer**

> **Technology cards:** Used for all gameplay models.
> Each player / team gets one.

> **Challenge cards:** Used for all gameplay models.
> Each player / team gets one.

> **Partners cards:** Used only with gameplay models B and C. Each player / team gets one.

> **Design variable cards:** Used only with gameplay models B and C. Each player / team gets one.

> **Guiding metaphor cards:** Used only with gameplay model C.
> Each player on a team gets one. These should not explicitly be shared with other team members.

> **A healthy dose of imagination**

Cards and elements explained

Technology cards: Contain emerging technologies (e.g. mixed reality). You must use this technology in the participatory futures activity that you create.

Challenge cards: Contain 21st century "wicked problems" – challenges without simple or easy solutions (e.g. extreme weather events). This is the challenge that your participatory futures activity should involve people to address.
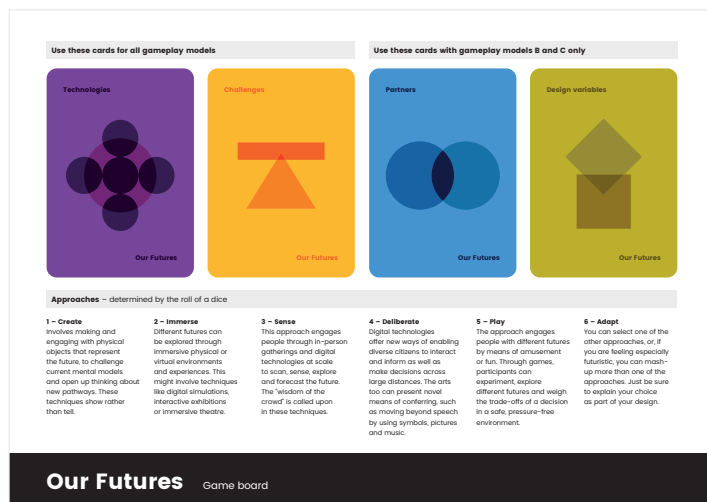

Partner cards: Partners are the people you must collaborate with in the scenario to deliver your imagined participatory futures activity (e.g. indigenous communities).

Design variable cards: Design variables are changeable properties of a participatory futures activity (e.g. the time horizon – whether people are thinking about a near or distant future). Your imagined scenario must take into account this constraint.

Guiding metaphor cards: These cards are only used with gameplay model C. The guiding metaphor (e.g. "not in my backyard") determines the worldview through which you should try to design a participatory futures activity.

Use these cards for all gameplay models | Use these cards with gameplay models B and C only

Technologies | Challenges | Partners | Design variables

Our Futures | Our Futures | Our Futures | Our Futures

Approaches – determined by the roll of a dice

1 – Create
Involves making and engaging with physical objects that represent the future, to challenge current mental models and open up thinking about new pathways. These techniques show rather than tell.

2 – Immerse
Different futures can be explored through immersive physical or virtual environments and experiences. This might involve techniques like digital simulations, interactive exhibitions or immersive theatre.

3 – Sense
This approach engages people through in-person gatherings and digital technologies at scale to scan, sense, explore and forecast the future. The 'wisdom of the crowd' is called upon in these techniques.

4 – Deliberate
Digital technologies offer new ways of enabling diverse citizens to interact and inform as well as make decisions across large distances. The arts too can present novel means of conferring, such as moving beyond speech by using symbols, pictures and music.

5 – Play
The approach engages people with different futures by means of amusement or fun. Through games, participants can experiment, explore different futures and weigh the trade-offs of a decision in a safe, pressure-free environment.

6 – Adapt
You can select one of the other approaches, or, if you are feeling especially futuristic, you can mash-up more than one of the approaches. Just be sure to explain your choice as part of your design.

Our Futures Game board

Game board: The cards that the player/team picks should be placed on this board.

Participatory futures approach: The approach determines the type of participatory futures activity that you will design. All six approaches are numbered and printed on the game board. Roll the dice and select the approach corresponding with the number on the dice (e.g. if you roll a one, you must use the 'create' approach).

Gameplay models: Rather than provide a single approach to gameplay, we offer three gameplay models (A, B and C) that increase in scope, framing and overall complexity. A is the simplest, B is of moderate difficulty and C is the most complex. Gameplay models A and B can be played either by a small group of individuals or teams competing against each other. Gameplay C can be played only with teams. If your group is new to designing participatory futures activities, you should start with gameplay A. Highly experienced and confident practitioners are welcome to jump straight to gameplay C.

Playing the game

1. The designated game facilitator will select which gameplay model to play – A, B or C and can remove cards from the various decks depending on the context and audience.

   If **gameplay model A** is selected, the facilitator instructs each player or team to pick one technology card and one challenge card at random to be placed on the board.

   If **gameplay model B** is selected, the facilitator instructs each player or team to pick one technology card, one challenge card, one partner card and one design variable card at random to be placed on the game board.

   If **gameplay model C** is selected, the facilitator instructs each team to pick one technology card, one challenge card, one partner card, and one design variable card at random. In addition, the facilitator will give a different guiding metaphor card to each player on the team.

2. The game facilitator introduces the game by reading the 'Game overview' section of the instructions, explaining each relevant card type, and the game board regardless of the selected gameplay model.

3. The game facilitator reads and explains the 'Example game using gameplay model A' from the instructions on page 11.

4. The facilitator creates a context for where and when the participatory futures activity that is being imagined should take place (e.g. it is the current year in Paris, or is it in five years time in rural India). The setting will help ground the game.

5. Each player or team rolls a dice to determine which approach to take, as outlined on the game board.

6. The facilitator sets a timer for 15–25 minutes to begin the first round of the game. As facilitator, the timing you set will be determined by which game play model you are using, the number of participants and their familiarity with the concept.

7. During this time, each player or team will begin brainstorming ideas for a participatory futures activity to address the challenge on their challenge card.

   For **gameplay model C**, which is meant to be played only in teams, each individual on each team has a different guiding metaphor, to simulate the reality of polarised conversations. Although each team should try to come to agreement on the participatory futures activity they want to design, it is possible that gameplay may break down as a result of this new element.

   Tip: Make sure participants have paper and pens to write down notes while they brainstorm and develop their participatory futures activity.

8. After the initial 15–25 minutes are up, each player/team will present their participatory futures activity to the rest of the group and explain how their scenario addresses the challenge on their challenge card.

9. The creator (either individual player or team) of the group's favourite participatory future wins.

10. After selecting the winner, allow time for the group to share reflections on the experience. The facilitator may want to suggest reflection questions, for example – how did the game encourage them to think differently about ways to engage the public in thinking about the future? What did they find hard, and why do they think this was?

How to win

The winning player or team will be chosen by everyone participating in a vote. Participants cannot vote for themselves or their own team. When voting, participants should take into account the following:

Response to the challenge
Utilisation of technology
How engaging the idea would be for people to take part in

The winning participatory futures activity should be compelling, fun and engaging. See an example below of a winning idea later on in the instructions under the heading 'Example game using gameplay model A'.
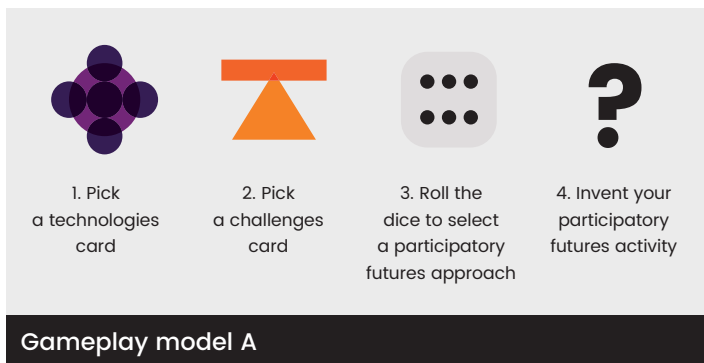
Choosing a gameplay model

Rather than provide a single approach to gameplay, we offer three models that increase in scope and complexity.

The facilitator can select to play gameplay model A, B, or C. Regardless of which model is selected, *Our Futures* can be adapted to your local context and goals. As a facilitator you may not feel that all cards are appropriate to your local context. Feel free to play the game according to your discretion and remove cards from the various decks to focus on specific challenges and technologies, or add your own.
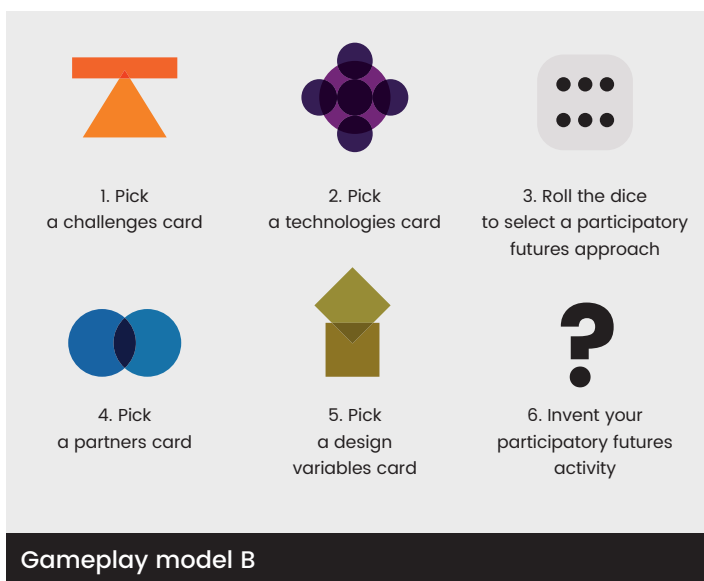
Gameplay model A
In this model, the technology and challenge cards take centre stage. The approaches (listed on the game board) provide a broad framing for the type of participatory futures activity you must design. Players combine their cards and the approach to invent a participatory futures activity. This gameplay model can be played either by individuals competing against each other or in teams.
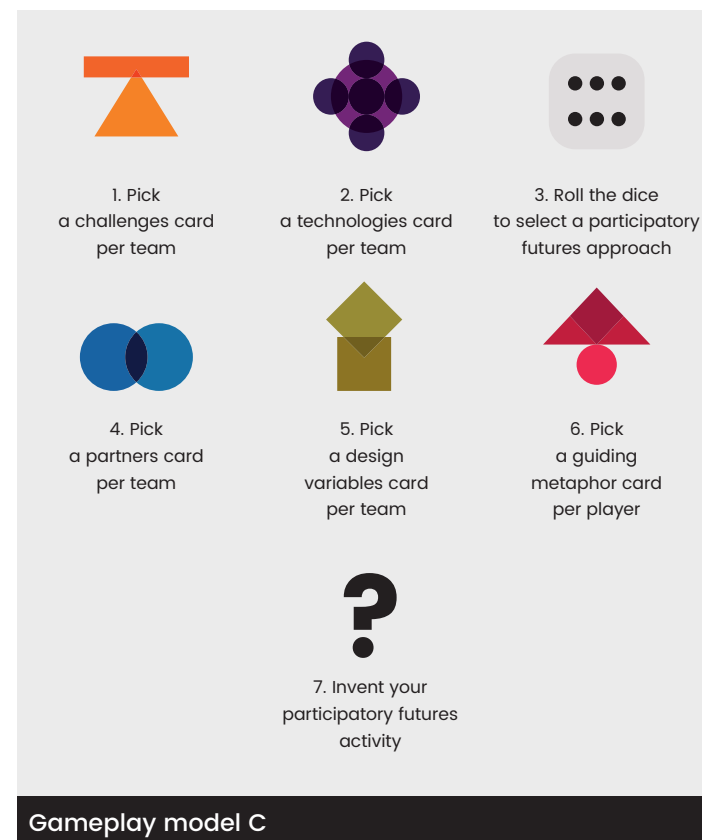
1. Pick a technologies card

2. Pick a challenges card

3. Roll the dice to select a participatory futures approach

4. Invent your participatory futures activity

Gameplay model A

Gameplay model B

This gameplay model adds two cards – the partners and design variable cards. Partners are the people you must collaborate with in the scenario to deliver your imagined participatory futures activity. The design variable cards focus on the changeable properties of a participatory futures activity (e.g. image of the future, impact, medium, level of participation, and time horizon). This gameplay model can be played either by individuals competing against each other or in teams.

1. Pick a challenges card

2. Pick a technologies card

3. Roll the dice to select a participatory futures approach

4. Pick a partners card

5. Pick a design variables card

6. Invent your participatory futures activity

Gameplay model B

Gameplay model C

This gameplay model is meant to be played in teams and introduces the guiding metaphor cards. The guiding metaphor cards are designed to help players consider the challenges of engaging different stakeholder groups with potentially opposing worldviews and to simulate polarised public discourse. Each team is given one technology, challenge, partners, and design variables card and uses the same participatory futures approach (as determined by the roll of the dice).

1. Pick a challenges card per team

2. Pick a technologies card per team

3. Roll the dice to select a participatory futures approach

4. Pick a partners card per team

5. Pick a design variables card per team

6. Pick a guiding metaphor card per player

7. Invent your participatory futures activity

Gameplay model C

Unlike other gameplay models, each individual within the team receives a different guiding metaphor card. These should not be explicitly shared with teammates. The reason for this is that everyone on a team is designing one participatory future but with a conflicting world view.

Because of the addition of guiding metaphor cards in this gameplay model, the thought process, and discussions and interactions between players on a team, are just as important as the outcome. Since every player has a different guiding metaphor card, it is possible that a team might not be able to create a consensus-driven design for a participatory futures activity in the allotted time. That's okay. When presenting back to the rest of the group, explain your thought process, attempts and challenges.

Example game using gameplay model A

Establish context
When: Summer 2030
Where: UN Headquarters, New York

Pick cards and game elements
Challenge card: Biodiversity loss
Technology card: Artificial intelligence
Participatory futures approach: 4. Deliberate

Invent participatory futures activity
Said the Arctic Fox
"I hereby call this meeting of the Interspecies Council of the Future (ICF) to order," said the Arctic fox. It is summer 2030, and thousands of species are threatened by the ongoing and impending impacts of global climate change. While many programs and projects sought to "save the whales," as the crisis worsened, it became apparent that those who were trying to be saved actually had no voice of their own to contribute to the conversation about what can and ought to be done. In response, the ICF was born. Through the ICF, species are represented by a specific artificial intelligence (AI) that aggregates and analyzes historical and real-time data forging a perspective shaped by a combination of cognitive biology and computational narration.

Members of the ICF speak with the same hope and sadness as their human counterparts in the deliberations, and their arguments often blend appeals to both the head and the heart. ICF members, from spotted owls to narwhals and tiger beetles to polar bears, participate fully in a variety of in-person (via holographic projection) and online engagements with people all over the world. Together they deliberate on the most pressing environmental questions of our age, from de-extinction initiatives to geoengineering. The ICF supports international decision-making by creating a platform for interspecies dialogue.

Explanation

The ICF example was born from a simple process. Three elements were combined – 21st century challenge (biodiversity loss); technology (AI); and an approach to participatory futures (deliberation). As AI continues to evolve, applications are likely to spread far and wide, including to areas beyond the limits of our present imagination. The ICF is not real. At least, not yet (not a prediction). The ICF is precisely the type of participatory futures activity that *Our Futures* seeks to help us imagine.

Tips and tricks

Facilitating gameplay is more art than science. These instructions are meant to be adapted and improved as desired. Feel free to experiment with play elements and timing in order to allow more or less time for players/teams to interact and engage. Facilitators should also feel free to make up their own cards if they have a particular scenario or challenge they'd like to brainstorm with everyone.

This game was originally created by Nesta