

## ✓ WHAT IT IS

A method that starts with identifying the desired end state and works backwards to identify the policies, programmes and events that will achieve it. Participants imagine what a successful outcome looks like and then answer the question, what do we need to do today to reach the vision of the future?

## ✓ WHEN TO USE IT

Use it after completing CLA, when you have already agreed the vision for the future. It is particularly useful when working on a complex problem that requires major change over a long period.

## ✓ WHY USE IT

It gives us a strategic pathway and timeframe from the future to the present, which includes key events, actions and decisions.



Backcasting is best done as an embodied or role-playing exercise to help participants get involved, have fun and immerse themselves in the activity. During in-person workshops, ask participants to contribute one key event, action and decision that led to the desired future; situate themselves on a physical timeline; and share their contribution with the group. Online collaboration tools can simulate the same idea, when used creatively.



## WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

Save the Children. 2019. The future is ours: strategic foresight toolkit – making better decisions, pages 89–99.

Free to download at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/future-ours-strategic-foresight-toolkit-making-better-decisions>

UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence. 2018. Foresight Manual: Empowered futures for the 2030 agenda, page 34.

Free to download at [www.undp.org/publications/foresight-manual-empowered-futures](http://www.undp.org/publications/foresight-manual-empowered-futures)

The Pacific Community. 2022. A compendium of Pacific practice in strategic foresight, page 55.

Available at <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b47zt>

## HOW TO DO IT



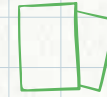
**Time**  
60 minutes



**No. of participants**  
Less than 50. Small groups of 8–10 people.



**Facilitation**  
1 facilitator and 1 or 2 notetakers

**Material**

Butchers/drawing paper



Coloured marker pens

**Time & Activity****Step****Description**


 10 minutes


1  **Explain the backcasting activity to participants.**

 20 minutes

2  **If holding the event in person, try the embodied exercise.**  
*See tip.*


 20 minutes

3  **Break into small groups.**  
*Each group to draw the timeline from the future and work back to the present day.*

 10 minutes

4  **Present backcasting activity back to groups.**

**Post-exercise**

5  **Collate findings from backcasting activity and provide back to participants.**

# CASE STUDY 15: BACKCASTING THE DESIRED FUTURE

We used backcasting to imagine future actions and events that occurred to help us reach our desired future state in each KFA of the SPC Strategic Plan. Backcasting formed the basis of our strategic results framework and expected outcomes at the 3- 5- and 8-year review intervals of the strategic plan. We combined this exercise with a futures triangle ([See Case study 7](#)) and CLA ([See Case study 14](#)).

## WHAT WE DID

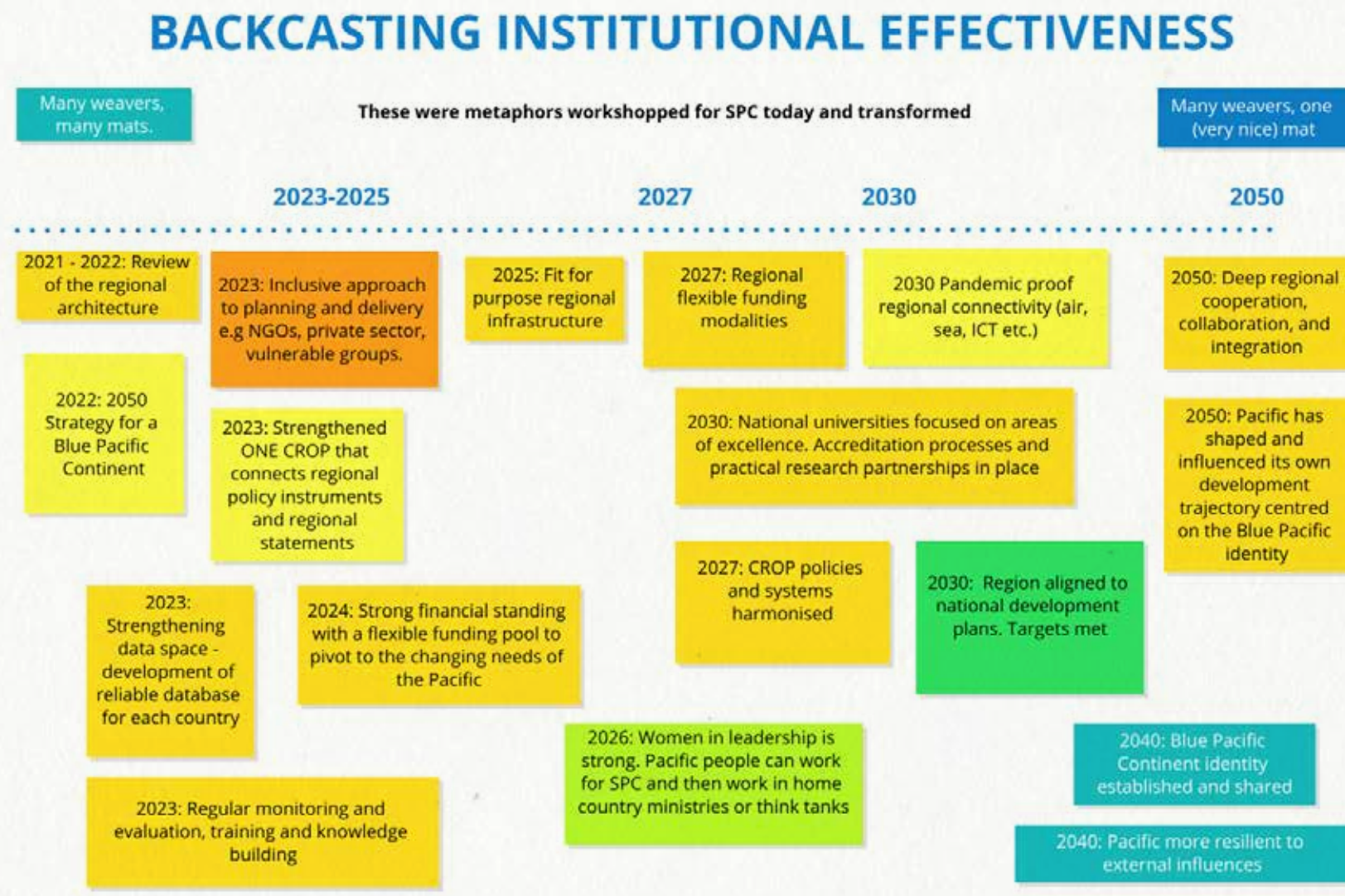
We used Conceptboard for this exercise and ran two-hour workshops for each KFA in the strategic plan. Each workshop included 30 minutes for the backcasting component. An average of 14 participants took part in each workshop, including country and territory representatives, and SPC senior leaders and technical staff.

In this exercise, participants took the transformed future state articulated by the CLA exercise ([see Case study 15](#)) and worked backwards to define the key actions and events that would need to take place in three, five and eight years – the review periods for Strategic Plan 2022–2031 ([see Figure 14](#)).





**Figure 14:**  
Extract from backcasting activity with the Drafting Committee for the Strategic Plan



Source SPC



## WHAT HAPPENED

*Our team analysed the backcasting information provided for each KFA. We found that the key actions and events could be clustered into five areas:*

1. Policy to action
2. Data, statistics and knowledge
3. Innovation and research
4. Digitalisation and technology
5. Capability and influence

These five areas have become the pathways in Strategic Plan 2022–2031 – they represent the ways that SPC will work to achieve its vision or future state in each KFA.

Backcasting was also the first step we took to developing the results framework for the strategy, which we refined through another series of participatory workshops in the first year of implementing the strategy.

## WHAT WE LEARNT

Backcasting is an interactive tool that helps a diverse group of participants think critically, hear different perspectives and articulate their ideas in a low-risk setting. It enables everyone's voice to be heard. The tool is a good way to synthesise people's inputs and agree key actions and milestones. It also helps more task-oriented thinkers to translate the visionary work into tangible actions and targets. It is important to allow enough time to synthesise the inputs. You also need a small group of participants who can review and validate the analysis and look for potential gaps.



# CASE STUDY 16: FUTURES SPEED DATING

**SPC used backcasting interviews at a senior leaders' retreat to help develop the strategic plan. The interviews were designed to unlock leaders' imagination of what a transformed SPC could look like and what trajectory the organisation would need to take to get there.**

## WHAT WE DID

Senior leaders worked in pairs. Over 15 minutes, they considered the following scenario and questions.

*Imagine it is 2040. You have retired. SPC has been reimagined and transformed. You are looking back at history, remembering the key events and changes that brought SPC to this preferable future state.*

- o What changes did it take to get here? When did these changes take place? (Consider the resources, skills, technology, systems and acts of divine intervention, fate or providence that helped achieve the transformation.)
- o What expertise was developed?
- o Who were the key players in the change?
- o What was the greatest challenge you successfully navigated?

Each pair recorded their responses. They were then tasked with identifying the three things that are pivotal in achieving transformational change.

## WHAT HAPPENED

We synthesised the interview notes and shared them with senior leaders. This gave the team a snapshot of insights about wins, critical events, key actions, capabilities, investments, key players, biggest challenges and lessons. We used the notes as evidence for the future state of SPC that is defined in Strategic Plan 2022–2031.





## WHAT WE LEARNT

Making this tool a game removed constraints and encouraged leaders to actively participate. By clearly explaining the purpose of the activity, and how the results would be used to create practical steps and milestones, participants could see the output and value of the activity.

Creating comfort for this exercise is important to have frank and open sharing of ideas. Be purposeful in who you team together and hold exercises such as this as part of a larger workshop that focuses on relational connections or team building. To prepare senior leaders to share their reimagined and transformed future vision of the organisation, we first asked them to participate in an embodied activity. Senior leaders lined up in order of when they joined the organisation. Starting from the longest-serving staff member, they then shared what the organisation was like when they joined. This helped to co-create an understanding of what is possible to change in a decade and to free minds to create from the future and not be restrained on planning from the present.



Futures thinking is applicable at all levels. It is for everyone. It helps you think of a utopia at the personal or community level, for the region or for the world. What would I want my Pacific to be like? That for me really appeals as it is inclusive from the start.

- SPC staff member and participant on the Become a Futurist course