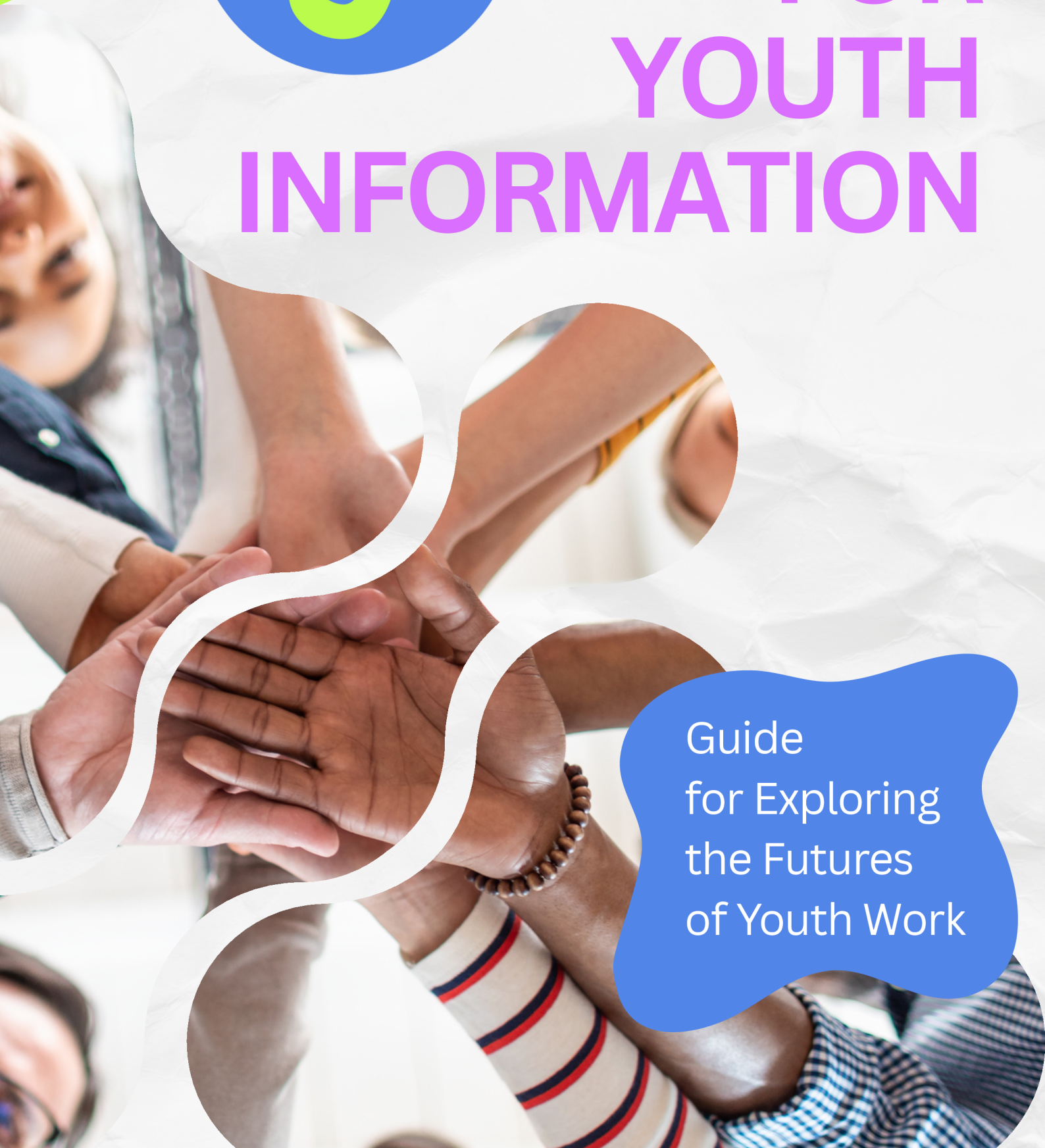
FOR YOUTH INFORMATION



Guide for Exploring the Futures of Youth Work

This publication was created within the project **For Youth Information (FYI)**

FYI project is an Erasmus+ funded initiative that builds a digital community where young people can access open educational resources, podcasts, videos, and toolkits to support their learning and engagement. Its mission is to empower youth through accessible, engaging resources and to foster lifelong learning. The vision is to create a dynamic digital space where young people can explore interests, gain skills, and connect with opportunities for growth. Its goals include strengthening non-formal educational tools, supporting youth workers, enhancing employability, and building a connected digital community.

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FOR YOUTH INFORM



Introduction

We live in a time of rapid change, uncertainty, and complexity. Emerging technologies, environmental challenges, shifting job markets, and evolving political landscapes are shaping the world that young people will inherit. In this context, foresight is not only a valuable tool but an essential skill. It helps us—and the young people we work with—critically examine trends, imagine possible futures, and design creative, resilient responses.

Foresight may seem abstract at first—like trying to look into the future—but in practice, it involves a range of accessible methods that help us prepare for what lies ahead. If you are reading this manual, you are likely curious about these approaches and eager to explore them further—which we greatly value.

The future should not simply happen to young people; they should be able to shape it. Youth work that integrates foresight can foster meaningful participation, critical reflection, and collective action. It helps young people understand systems, engage in decision-making, and act with greater awareness of the world around them.

Therefore, this manual has been created for educators, youth workers, and facilitators—not just to inform, but to support their practice. It offers practical tools, structured methodologies, and adaptable activities to develop young people's critical thinking, civic awareness, and digital literacy.

The content is the result of collaboration between youth workers, educators, researchers, and young people from across Europe. It reflects shared values of inclusion, participation, and ethical engagement. The methods and ideas presented here are open to interpretation, so we encourage you to adapt them to your own context and learners' needs.

Whether you are new to foresight or already exploring it in your work, we hope this manual will serve as both a practical guide and a source of inspiration. Stay curious, think critically, and share your experience—foresight is a living practice that grows through dialogue, creativity, and collaboration.

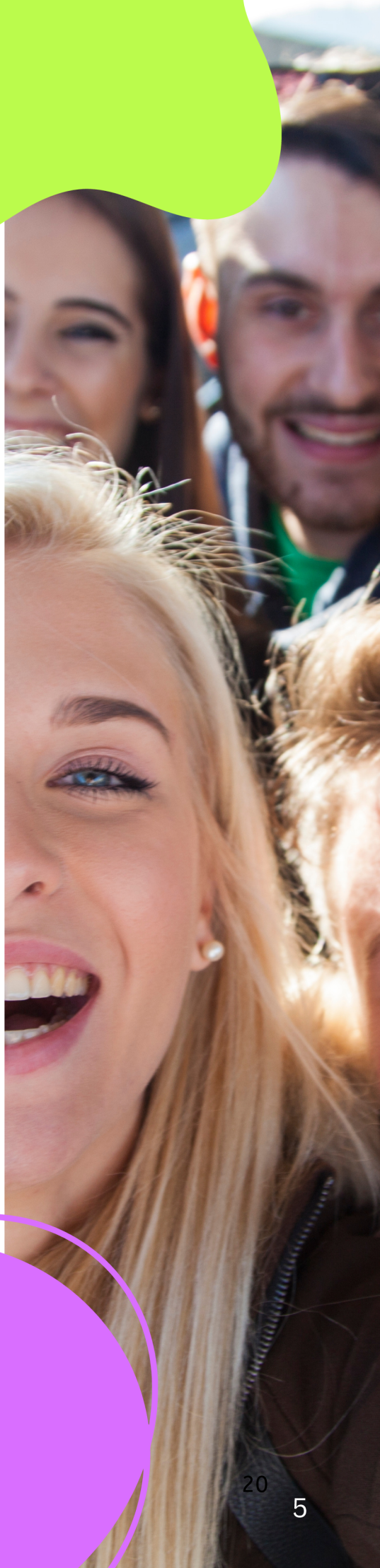
1 WHAT IS FORESIGHT?

Foresight is a systematic approach that explores various potential futures to develop effective strategies for today. Instead of focusing on a single outcome, it encourages consideration of multiple possibilities (UNDP, 2018). This practice enhances resilience, strategic thinking, and creativity - vital in an era of rapid change and complex challenges.

1.1 Core Principles of Foresight

The ability to look beyond the present has long driven progress. Whether you work with young people, shape policies, or support communities, anticipating change and preparing for uncertainty can lead to more resilient, inclusive, and creative outcomes.

With these aspects in mind, this chapter presents key principles and methods that demonstrate how foresight can support individuals, particularly youth workers, educators, and NGOs working with young people. It offers practical strategies for thinking about possible futures and acting on them in the present.



FORESIGHT APPROACHES



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018) distinguishes between several approaches of foresight, each of which serves a different purpose:

Strategic foresight

Used to inform long-term planning, resilience building, and systems thinking.

Participatory foresight

Focuses on co-creation and stakeholder engagement, allowing diverse voices to shape future visions.

Policy foresight

Assesses how policies might work under different future conditions.

Normative foresight

Focuses on articulating desired futures and the pathways needed to achieve them.

Innovation foresight

Helps identify emerging technologies and areas for future innovation.

FORESIGHT CORE PRINCIPLES



Each type of foresight has distinct applicability in academia and strategies for business and policymaking. UNDP (2018) and GCPSE (2015) identify the following core principles:



Futures thinking

Recognising that the future is plural, uncertain, and shaped by present-day decisions

Systemic analysis

Considering interconnected factors across political, technological, social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Participation and inclusivity

Involving diverse actors and viewpoints.

Long-term orientation

Looking beyond short-term cycles to medium- and long-term time horizons.

Iterative learning

Continuously revisiting and adapting strategic assumptions.

The Czech methodological guide Priorities complements the above-mentioned approaches with a structured five-phase model (5P): Prepare, Perceive, Anticipate, Plan, and Present (České Priority, 2022). These reflect both the practical and reflective nature of forecasting work.

We recommend exploring the following subchapters for those who want to understand foresight more deeply. There, you will find the theoretical foundations and practical applications of the above methods and tools.

Let’s dive deeper!

1.2 Where is Foresight Used?



Around the world, organisations in both the public and private sectors are turning to foresight to imagine and prepare for different futures. Whether it is a government planning the future of education, a company developing sustainable products, or a university studying emerging global trends, foresight provides practical tools to manage change with purpose.



For youth workers, understanding how foresight is used in different fields can open up new opportunities. It offers creative ways to engage young people in future-oriented thinking - helping them to build confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency in shaping the world around them.

In the following section, we explore three key areas where foresight is widely used: business, policy and the public sector, and academic research. By seeing how different sectors apply foresight, we can better understand its real-world value and how similar approaches can support work with young people.

Foresight in Policy and the Public Sector

Governments and public institutions are increasingly using foresight to address future challenges. This approach encourages strategic thinking and helps leaders develop resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking policies.

At the European level, the Strategic Foresight Agenda guides the European Commission in tackling issues like climate change, digitalisation, demographic shifts, and geopolitical uncertainties (European Commission, 2024). These insights inform decisions on funding, social protection, green transitions, and innovation.Cities and regions apply foresight through citizen panels and youth assemblies, engaging communities in shaping education, urban development, and climate responses. This involvement makes policymaking more democratic and inclusive.

Public health has also benefited from foresight. During the COVID-19 pandemic, several governments used horizon scanning to identify early risks and respond more effectively (OECD, 2022).

Foresight in Business

In the business world, foresight helps organisations prepare for change, spot new opportunities, and stay competitive. Unlike short-term planning, it looks 10, 20, or even 30 years ahead to anticipate how global trends, technologies, and consumer needs might evolve-enabling more thoughtful decisions and resilient strategies.

A well-known example is Shell's use of scenario planning, which began in the 1970s. By developing alternative stories about the future of the energy sector, Shell was able to adapt to oil shocks and anticipate market disruptions - a practice now widely adopted across industries (Polytechnique Insights, 2021).

Today, companies use foresight to explore how emerging technologies like AI or blockchain, environmental changes, and shifting values may shape markets. For instance, a fashion brand might analyse trends in youth demand for sustainability, while a food delivery service could use horizon scanning to detect signals like the rise of lab-grown meat or hyperlocal diets.Many firms now establish foresight teams or work with innovation consultants to explore long-term futures, test business models, and design products that address future needs.For young people, understanding how businesses use foresight can spark ideas for social innovation or entrepreneurship. Youth workers can encourage projects that apply similar tools to imagine new solutions for local or global challenges.

Foresight in Academia and Research

Academic settings, foresight is often more exploratory and theoretical, but it still makes a significant real-world impact. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), for example, promotes futures literacy - the ability to imagine and reflect on multiple possible futures.

This helps people think in more flexible and creative ways, rather than assuming the future will follow a straight path from the present (JRC, 2020). The JRC also supports horizon scanning and trend analysis in areas like green technology, digital transformation, and global inequalities. Universities worldwide contribute to major foresight projects that explore the future of learning, work, public health, and democracy. For example, the University of Turku in Finland coordinated the "Millennium Project" to explore future skills needs, while the University of Geneva has worked on future scenarios for sustainability education.



Academic foresight is becoming increasingly participatory, involving faculty, students, and communities in co-creating visions of the future. This reflects the belief that the future is not fixed, but something we shape together.

To wrap up this section, we can say that foresight is already influencing decisions in business, government, and research. By understanding how it is applied in these fields, young people can gain valuable insights into how the world works and how it changes. These examples show that foresight is not just about prediction but also about preparation, creativity, and action. Learning to explore trends, imagine future scenarios, and think critically about change can help young people make informed choices, understand complex challenges, and actively contribute to building better futures.

1.3 TYPES OF FORESIGHT



It's important to note that there is no single method for foresight. Instead, this field encompasses a variety of approaches. Some methods focus on identifying trends and patterns, such as trend analysis. Others emphasise imagination and storytelling, like scenario planning, while some prioritise co-creation, as seen in participatory foresight. For youth workers, these diverse approaches provide meaningful ways to engage young people. They help the youth reflect on the future, develop essential skills, and shape their paths forward.

Reflection Question

How could exploring multiple foresight methods deepen your engagement with youth?



Trend Analysis and Horizon Scanning

Trend analysis helps identify and interpret significant shifts (social, technological, economic, cultural, and environmental) that are already shaping tomorrow. Horizon scanning complements this by spotting weak signals: early signs of emerging change across media, research, social conversations, or youth feedback.

These techniques help youth workers:

- Stay ahead of emerging needs relevant to young people.
- Keep activities up to date and culturally relevant.
- Adapt programs to stay aligned with evolving realities.

Scenario Planning and Futures Narratives

Scenario planning explores several plausible futures instead of predicting a single one. It encourages young people to ask:

- What might happen under different conditions?
- How could we respond?
- What new risks or opportunities could emerge?

This process builds flexibility and fosters creative problem-solving. It helps young people and others to approach uncertainty with confidence, not fear.
Futures narratives complement this process through storytelling, helping bring scenarios to life. These stories connect emotionally with possible futures and enhance personal reflection and understanding.



Visioning and Backcasting

Visioning invites young people to imagine the future they want. It focuses on shared values, aspirations, and the society or community they hope to live in. This forward-looking mindset shifts the focus from problems to possibilities.

Backcasting then turns those visions into action. Starting with the preferred future, participants work backwards to identify the steps needed to get there. This makes ambitious goals feel practical and within reach.



Strategic Foresight and Roadmapping

Strategic foresight helps connect ideas about the future with real-world planning. It supports long-term thinking and informed decision-making. Often, it brings together several foresight tools to form a cohesive strategy.

A key output is the roadmap. Roadmapping creates a structured plan with clear goals, timelines, and milestones. For youth workers, it helps ensure that programs are relevant, practical, and goal-oriented.

Participatory and Experiential Foresight

Participatory foresight centres youth as co-creators of the future. Rather than being passive participants, they are actively involved in shaping ideas and solutions. This approach values their experiences and perspectives, making foresight more inclusive and grounded.

Experiential foresight complements this through immersive activities. Simulations, storytelling, role-play, and games help young people explore complex ideas in engaging and memorable ways. These methods build empathy, critical thinking, and real-world skills.

Why these approaches matter in Youth Work

Foresight helps young people prepare, adapt, and act with purpose. All methods encourage long-term thinking, creativity, and resilience.

They make abstract topics more relatable and help young people see themselves as capable of influencing the future.



Foresight in youth work promotes:

- A proactive mindset and greater awareness of future possibilities
- A clearer sense of purpose and direction
- Increased confidence in dealing with uncertainty
- Greater participation in shaping local and global change



Conclusion and next steps

The approaches outlined above offer youth workers a flexible and powerful set of tools. Used in combination and adapted to different contexts, they support a thoughtful and responsive way of working with youngsters. When applied with care, these methods not only help navigate uncertainty but also empower youth to take an active role in shaping the future.

Ultimately, it's less about predicting the future and more about imagining what could be—and taking deliberate steps towards more desirable outcomes.

Reflection questions

- Which foresight methods match the needs of the youth you work with?
- How can you include young people as co-creators in these processes?
- What is one small step you can take to begin applying foresight in your next session?

1.4 Practical applications



Working with uncertainty is part of modern youth work, and having ways to explore what the future might hold can make our responses more thoughtful, inclusive, and effective. Instead of asking “What will happen?”, this approach invites us to ask:

The 3x W

1. “What could happen?”
2. “What should we prepare for?”
3. “What kind of future do we want to create?”

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Applying Foresight in Youth Work

If you want to apply the foresight tools to your everyday work with young people, but don't really know how to - or even where to start, don't worry! We prepared a short step-by-step guide.

Start with curiosity
Ask young people questions like: What does your ideal future look like? What worries you? What excites you?

Scan for trends
Stay updated on social, tech, and cultural shifts. Use tools like Google Trends, TikTok observation, or local surveys.

Create mini scenarios
With your team or youth group, write two or three future stories: one optimistic, one challenging, one surprising.

Work Backwards
Choose a positive scenario and build a »backwards map« of how to reach it. What steps need to be taken to achieve it? What can we do to start today?

Embed in Programming
Integrate foresight into different areas of your work: career guidance, creative arts, activism, or civic education projects.

Foresight in Action: Practical Examples

If foresight still feels abstract, here are several real-life examples - from national policies to international youth initiatives - that demonstrate how it can be used to shape strategy, participation, and change.

1. Local Government & Youth Policy (Finland)

Finland's National Youth Council includes a Research, Foresight and Evaluation Section, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The country uses foresight in national youth policy planning, regularly conducting Youth Barometers and strategic foresight exercises to explore future trends in young people's lives, such as education, digital habits, and political engagement.

Practical outcome:
Finland's National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme—adopted every four years at the government level—aims to create supportive environments for youth development. Insights from foresight exercises have shaped policies such as expanded mental health services and new digital youth platforms.

2. Organisational Foresight - The World YMCA's "One Million Voices"

The World YMCA led a global foresight campaign, gathering youth perspectives from 55 countries to better understand their visions for the future. The outcomes informed programming on employment, climate justice, and equality.

Practical outcome:
Based on youth input, several YMCA branches launched green entrepreneurship initiatives and digital training hubs (World YMCA).

3. UNICEF's "Youth Foresight Fellowship"

The Youth Foresight Fellowship is an eight-month programme that brings together young leaders (aged 15–25) to explore the future of child rights. It equips participants with foresight skills and platforms to develop solutions within their communities.

Practical outcome 1:
In just three years, the Fellowship has reached over 13,000 youth in 160 countries, influenced UNICEF reports and strategies, and supported foresight training within the organisation, empowering a new generation of future-focused youth leaders.

Practical outcome 2:
Youth-Led Futures Design:
This initiative engaged young people in participatory foresight activities to influence policies that affect them, promoting inclusive, future-oriented policy design.

4. The United Nations' »Our Future Agenda«

The »Our Future Agenda« is a program by the UN Foundation that empowers young changemakers to be agents of change for a sustainable world by 2100. It offers a platform for young innovators to reimagine the UN for 21st-century needs, fostering collective action and building alliances to address shared challenges. The UN launched this global initiative to center youth voices in future planning. Through listening sessions and futures thinking workshops, young leaders contributed to proposals on education reform, climate action, and technology ethics (Our Future Agenda: Unlocking the Power of Next and Future Generations).

Practical outcome:
»Our Future Agenda« program has a real potential to make an impact for youth workers – it provides a global framework and inspiration to run local versions, inviting youth to co-design futures that reflect their needs and hopes. It comes to life through 3 impactful initiatives – the Unlock the Future coalition, Next Generation Fellows and Intergenerational Action, that transform »Our Future Agenda« into tangible outcomes, helping to drive positive change and create a sustainable future.



Reflection Questions

- Have you heard or participated in similar good practices?
- Can you find such examples in youth work in your country and community?
- What could be applicable in your work?

Here we shared a short example of the steps on how you can introduce and apply foresight in your work. Further in the Guidelines you will find many examples and specific tools you can use for each particular step.

1.5 Why It Matters?

The real strength of working with the future isn't about having the right answers; it's about learning to ask the right questions. For youth workers, this mindset offers a powerful foundation for action. It can help to:

- Anticipate needs before they become crises
- Build future-ready skills such as adaptability, creativity, and critical thinking
- Empower young people to see themselves as co-creators of their world

By adopting this approach, youth work shifts from being merely reactive to genuinely forward-looking to empowering practitioners and youngsters to anticipate challenges, embrace opportunities, and navigate change with confidence and purpose. It fosters adaptability and ensures that the youth not only respond to evolving circumstances but actively shape the world around them.

Foresight encourages us to think beyond the immediate, embracing innovation, multiple perspectives, and unexpected possibilities. It strengthens our ability to support young people in a dynamic world, helping them develop resilience, curiosity, and informed decision-making.

Most importantly, this approach reinforces a vital truth: the future is not something we wait for, it is something we create, together

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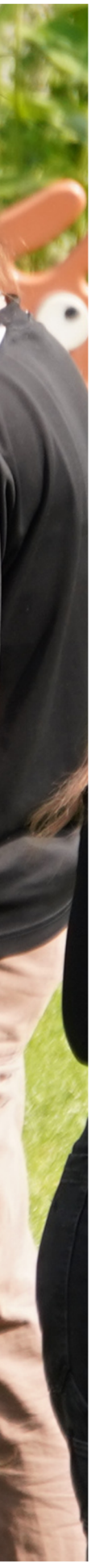
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2 ABOUT FORESIGHT METHODOLOGIES



In the previous chapter, we emphasised the value of foresight in youth work, especially in fostering intentional, creative, and resilient practices. Now, the focus shifts to how these ideas can be implemented.

This chapter introduces various meth ods that help youth workers explore future possibilities in meaningful and accessible ways. From playful activities to structured planning tools, these approaches support reflection, dialogue, and action, empowering young people to think critically and shape the future they want to see.





2.1 Why Understanding Different Methods Matters in Youth Work

As outlined in the text above, foresight is most effective when paired with the right methods for the context. Choosing an appropriate approach isn't just a technical decision; it ensures the process is meaningful, engaging, and relevant to young people.

Various methods are available, ranging from simple and playful to more analytical. It's essential to know when and how to use these methods to ensure they are meaningful and accessible to young people. Our goal is to choose approaches that align with your objectives and the needs of the youth you work with.



As it can be observed from the text above, the field of foresight presents a diverse range of tools and techniques. Knowing which method to use, when, and how is crucial for effectively engaging young people.

Therefore, in the following sections, you'll find an overview of available methodologies – from simple, playful activities to more complex analytical processes – and offers guidance on choosing the right approach for your specific youth work context and goals.

- **Develop Future Literacy**: Help young people understand driving forces, identify trends, and think critically about different potential outcomes.
- **Foster Agency:** Empower young people to see themselves not just as passive recipients of the future, but as active agents who can make choices and take actions that influence it (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023).
- **Enhance Critical Thinking & Creativity:** Encourage questioning assumptions, imagining alternatives, and developing innovative solutions.
- **Build Resilience:** Prepare young people to adapt to unexpected changes and navigate uncertainty with greater confidence (Steinmüller & Steinmüller, as cited in Mendonça et al., n.d.).
- **Promote Participation & Dialogue**: Create spaces for collaborative exploration of shared hopes, fears, and visions for the future.

The Spectrum of Foresight: From Simple Engagement to Deep Analysis

Think of foresight methodologies as a toolkit.
Some tools are quick and easy to use for specific tasks, while others are more powerful but require more skill and preparation. In youth work, we often lean towards methods that are participatory, engaging, and adaptable.

1. Simpler, Intuitive & Highly Participatory Methods:

These methods are often the best entry points for introducing futures thinking to young people. They prioritise interaction, imagination, and making abstract concepts tangible and fun. They generally require less preparation time and rely more on group dynamics and creative facilitation.

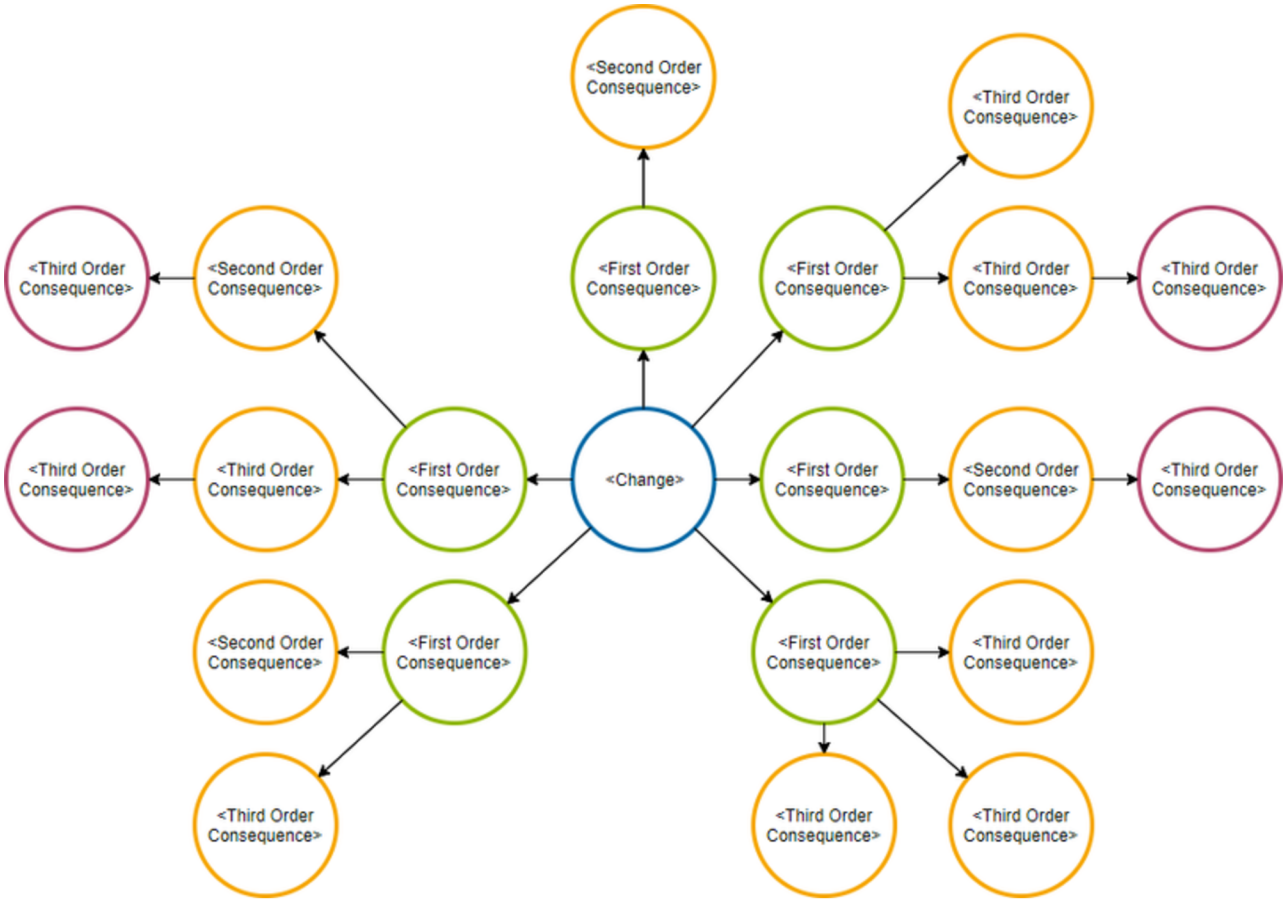
Key Characteristics:
Visually engaging, activity-based, collaborative, emphasis on storytelling and imagination, lower barrier to entry.

Examples in Youth Work:

Brainstorming Future Topics:
A quick group session to generate ideas about future hopes, fears, or changes related to a specific theme (e.g., "What will friendships look like in 10 years?"). (ETF Open Space, n.d.).

Future Telling / Role-Playing:
As detailed in its own chapter, this involves acting out short scenes from a possible future. Excellent for exploring the emotional and social dimensions of future scenarios in a relatable way (Carleton et al., 2013).

Futures Wheel (Introductory Level):
A visual mind-mapping exercise to quickly explore the direct and indirect consequences of a single trend or event (e.g., "What happens if our local youth centre closes?"). Good for sparking initial discussions (Better evaluation, n.d.)



Source: https://online.visual-paradigm.com/knowledge/decision-analysis/what-is-futures-wheel/

Simple Trend Spotting:
Asking young people to share recent news, social media posts, or observations that surprised them or seemed new, and discussing what these might indicate about the future.

Visual Collages / Mood Boards:
Creating visual representations of desired or feared futures using images, words, and drawings.



2. More Structured, Analytical & In-Depth Methods:

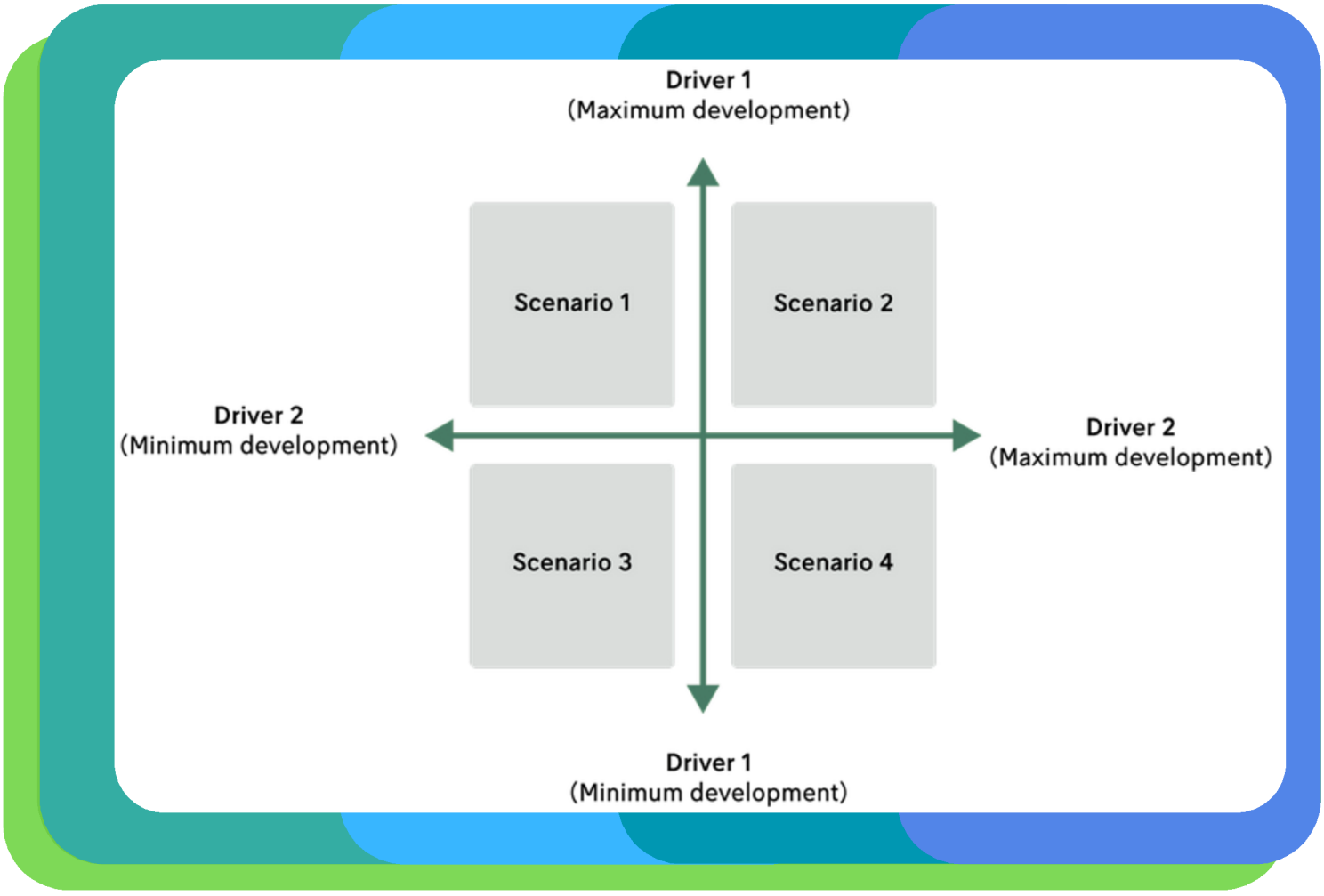
These methods offer deeper insights but often require more structured facilitation, potentially some background research, and a more time commitment from participants. They are valuable when you need to analyse complex interactions, develop detailed plans, or consult specific expertise.

Key Characteristics:

More systematic, may involve data or expert input, focus on analysis and structure, can require more facilitation expertise or preparation.

Examples in Youth Work:

Detailed Scenario Building (e.g., 2x2 Matrix, Key Factors): Systematically developing distinct, plausible narratives about the future based on identifying and analysing key driving forces and uncertainties. The 2x2 Matrix method, while structured, can be adapted into a very interactive workshop format suitable for youth (UN Global Pulse, n.d.; OpenFutures, n.d.). Requires careful selection of drivers.



Source: https://www.futuresplatform.com/blog/2x2-scenario-planning-matrix-guideline

- **Backcasting:** Starting with a shared vision of a desirable future (e.g., "Our town is fully youth-friendly by 2035") and working backwards collaboratively to identify the necessary steps, milestones, and actions needed today and tomorrow to achieve it (UNDP, 2018). Powerful for action planning.

- **Horizon Scanning (Community Level):** A more organised effort where youth groups systematically monitor local news, community forums, school policies, etc., to identify emerging issues or trends relevant to young people in their area (Futures Platform, n.d.). Can feed into other activities.

- **Delphi Method (Adapted):** While traditionally involving experts, simplified versions could be used within a youth council or project group to gather diverse opinions on priorities for future action through anonymous rounds of feedback, ensuring quieter voices are heard (Linstone & Turoff, 1975/2002). Requires careful setup.

- **Cross-Impact Analysis (Simplified):** Exploring how different trends relevant to youth (e.g., mental health awareness, AI in education, gig economy jobs) might influence each other, perhaps using a simple matrix and group discussion rather than complex calculations (Gordon & Hayward, 1968, as cited in various sources; Foresight Culture, n.d.).

Understanding this spectrum helps you select methods that match your group's experience level, the time you have, and the depth of exploration you aim for.



CHOOSING **THE RIGHT FORESIGHT TOOL** FOR YOUR YOUTH WORK PRACTICE

1. What is your purpose? (The Why)
2. How uncertain or complex is the topic? (The "How")
3. What resources do you have? (The "What")
4. Who are the young people involved? (The "Who")
5. What is the time horizon? (The "When")

1 WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE? (THE "WHY")

- **Sparking curiosity, and awareness:** Goal: introduce future thinking, get young people talking and imagining. Methods:Future Telling, simple Trend Spotting, Futures Wheel, brainstorming.
- **Exploring possibilities:** Goal: understand the range of potential futures related to a topic (e.g., future of work, climate change impacts). Methods: exploratory scenarios (e.g., 2x2 Matrix), Horizon Scanning, weak signals.
- **Creating shared visions:** Goal: define a desirable future that the group wants to work towards. Methods: Normative Scenarios, strategic visioning, Backcasting (starting point).
- **Developing strategies and action plans:** Goal: figure out how to achieve a desired future or navigate expected challenges. Methods: backcasting, action pathways, roadmapping (simplified).
- **Building resilience and preparedness:** Goal: consider potential disruptions and how the group or community might respond. Methods: Wild Cards discussions, disruptive scenarios, Futures Wheel (for impacts).
- **Deepening understanding of a complex issue:** Goal: analyse the interplay of different factors influencing a future topic. Methods: Cross-Impact Analysis (simplified), system mapping.

2 HOW UNCERTAIN OR COMPLEX IS THE TOPIC? (THE "HOW")

- **High uncertainty/complexity:** when the future feels very unpredictable or involves many interacting factors (e.g., long-term impact of AI, global political shifts), methods that embrace multiple possibilities are essential. Methods: Scenario Building, Wild Cards, Horizon Scanning.
- **Lower uncertainty/clearer goals:** When there's a clearer desired outcome or the focus is on more predictable trends, planning-oriented methods might be more suitable. Methods: Backcasting, Action Pathways.

3 WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU HAVE? (THE "WHAT")

- Time: how much time can you dedicate? A quick Futures Wheel might take 30 minutes, while a full Scenario Building workshop could take several hours or even days (see: 2x2 Matrix workshop plan).
- Materials and space: Do you need flip charts, post-its, digital tools (like Miro), or space for performance?
- Facilitation comfort: Are you comfortable leading open-ended creative processes or more structured analytical ones? Choose methods you feel confident facilitating or co-facilitating. Some complex methods might benefit from external expertise if available.

4 WHO ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED? (THE "WHO")

- Age and development stage: Adapt complexity and abstractness. Younger groups might respond better to storytelling, drawing, and role-playing, while older youth might engage more with analysis and strategy.
- Group size and dynamics: Some methods work better in small groups (deep scenario work), others in larger groups (brainstorming, introductory activities). Consider existing group cohesion and communication styles.
- Prior experience: Have they engaged in futures thinking before? Start with simpler, engaging methods for newcomers.
- Learning styles and preferences: Offer a mix of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities if possible.

5 WHAT IS THE TIME HORIZON? (THE "WHEN")

- Near-term (1-5 years): Focus might be on current trends, immediate challenges, and concrete action planning. Methods: Trend Analysis, Action Pathways, Futures Wheel.
- Long-term (10-25+ years): Encourages more imaginative leaps, exploring fundamental shifts and creating transformative visions. Methods: Scenario building, Backcasting from a distant future, Future Telling, exploring significantly different worlds.

COMBINING METHODS FOR RICHER EXPERIENCES

Often, the most powerful approach involves combining several methods sequentially.

You might start with:

- Horizon scanning/Trend spotting: to identify key changes happening now.
- Futures Wheel/Future Telling: to explore the potential impacts or feelings associated with a key trend.
- Scenario Building (e.g., 2x2 matrix): to develop distinct alternative futures based on the most critical uncertainties.
- Backcasting/Action pathways: to plan steps towards a preferred scenario identified earlier.

This creates a journey for young people, moving from awareness and exploration to visioning and action, building their foresight capacity step-by-step.

By carefully considering these factors, you can select and adapt methods that make foresight relevant and engaging, empowering young people to think critically, act purposefully, and participate in shaping the future.

2.2 TREND EXPLORATION

A trend is a pattern of change emerging over time. It's built from signals (small indicators of change) and events (shifts already happening around us). When these signals form consistent patterns, they become trends that help us understand where things might be heading. But trends don't act in isolation. They interact, collide, and amplify each other, and it's this interplay that often brings the most significant change.

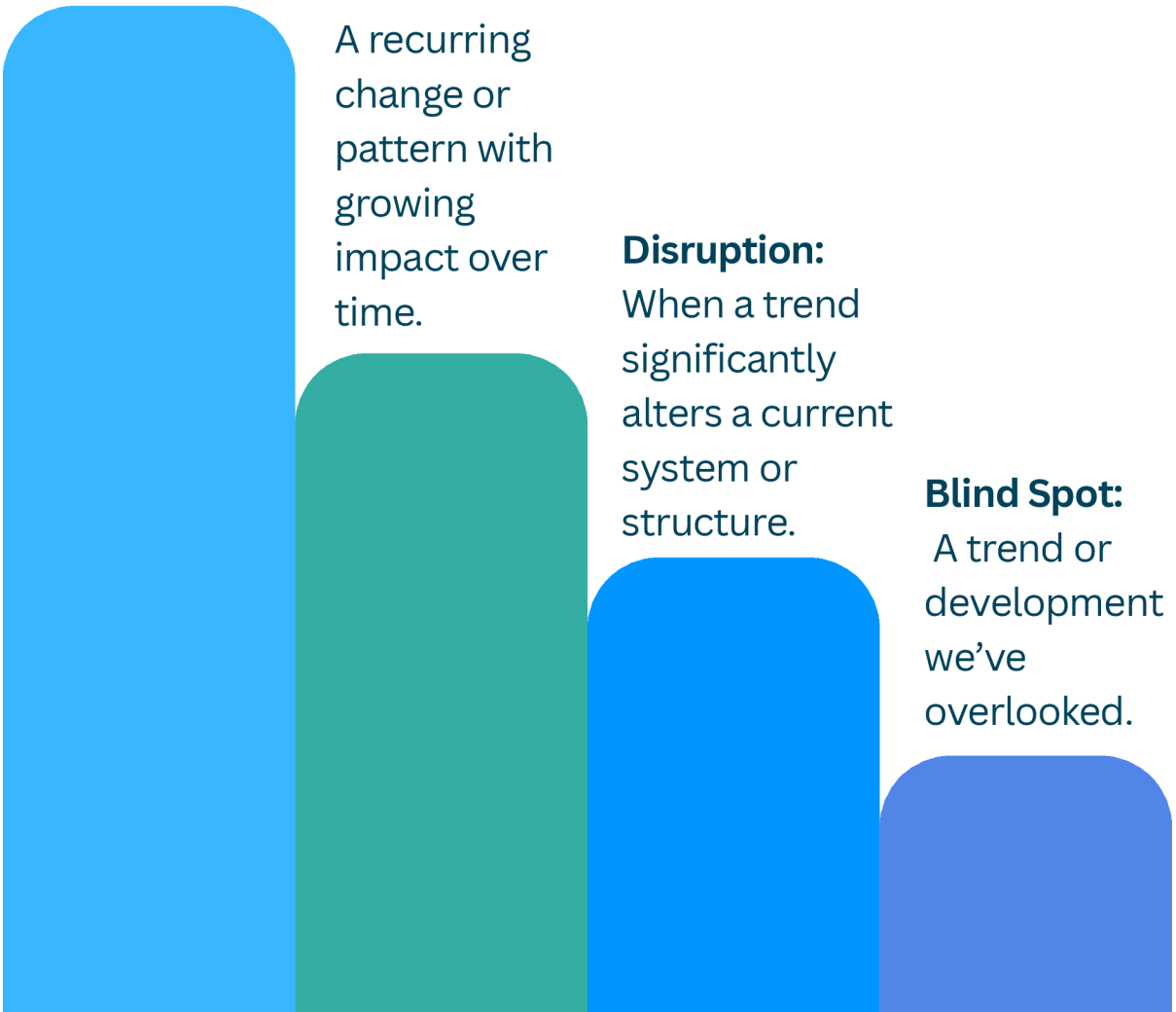
Key concepts:

Signal:
A smaller, often early, sign that something is changing.

Trend:
A recurring change or pattern with growing impact over time.

Disruption:
When a trend significantly alters a current system or structure.

Blind Spot:
A trend or development we've overlooked.



TOOLS FOR TREND EXPLORATION

Trend cards:

These are pre-written cards describing a trend. Each card might include:

- The trend's name (e.g. "Growing Inequality")
- A short description
- Signals or examples
- Who or what is impacted

In youth work, you can create trend cards tailored to local realities, for example:

- "Rise of Virtual Friendships"
- "Youth-led Climate Action"
- "Mental Health App Boom"

TREND MAPPING:

Once several trends are identified, you can map them visually

- Which are the most disruptive?
- How might they interact?
- Are any accelerating or slowing down?

You can use sticky notes, whiteboards, or online tools like Miro or Padlet.

TECHNIQUES FOR TREND EXPLORATION

If you want to know how to start trend exploration in your work, you've come to the right place! Below are some techniques and steps you can take to successfully facilitate a trend exploration session.

Start with ...

- Form a small team - could be staff or youth.
- Set a topic - like employment, education, digital safety, or community life.
- Do a quick scan - news articles, social media, youth surveys.
- Identify 5-10 trends and write them as cards.
- Facilitate a session with groups to explore and reflect.
- Discuss what these trends mean for your programs, partnerships, or advocacy.

HOW DOES THIS LOOK IN PRACTICE: GROUP DISCUSSION WORKSHOPS

You can run a session to explore trends using the technique of group discussion. Here's a handy step-by-step guide for a trend exploration session, inspired by the Toolkit for Tomorrow.

- Introduce what trends are and why they matter (5 min)
- Share trend cards (5 min) - you can find templates for trend cards in the Appendix of the Toolkit for Tomorrow, or you can design your own.
- Group discussion: Which trends are most disruptive? How do they connect? (20 min)
- Identify missing trends using a blank trend card template (10 min) - you can find the blank template in the Appendix of the Toolkit for Tomorrow, or you can design your own.
- Share insights with the wider group (15 min)

This can be done with different target groups, with your fellow youth workers or directly with youth to help them build futures literacy.

TOPICS YOU CAN TACKLE WITH YOUTH, USING TREND EXPLORATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Exploring trends can be an effective way to delve into topics that are important to young people. Below, you'll find two examples. We encourage you to think about how these sessions could be expanded to foster meaningful change in the future.

Youth Mental Health Trends

Your organisation notices a rising trend of young people discussing anxiety on TikTok and Reddit. By exploring this trend with youth, you can co-design peer support circles and partner with app developers to pilot a local mental wellness chatbot.

Green Skills for the Future

A regional youth centre spotted increasing global demand for green jobs. They explored the trend by reviewing news, policy shifts, and talking to young environmentalists. The outcome? A youth-designed "Green Career" toolkit and mentorship program.
Using these two examples, try to imagine another important topic that you could explore with youth. What could be the outcomes? Is it something concrete and tangible? Congratulations - you just used foresight as a tool in visualising the future!
Exploring trends isn't just about future-proofing; it's about empowering young people to become shapers of their future. It brings better program design rooted in lived realities and emerging shifts. It also encourages youth participation and ownership and a mindset of adaptation, curiosity, and co-creation.



Reflection Questions

What trends are most affecting the young people I work with?

How can I involve youth in identifying and responding to these trends?

What new opportunities might arise if I act on these insights today?

2.3 FUTURE TELLING

Future Telling is a dramatic storytelling technique where a group performs a short scene from a possible future. It might be a skit, role-play, or even a recorded video, but the goal is the same: make the future feel real.

Rather than just discussing change, participants explore what it feels like, looks like, and means to live in that future. It’s especially helpful when futures are complex, emotional, or hard to put into words.

Future Telling can have a real impact on youth work, because it's more than a performance. It's a mirror and a map. It helps youth to imagine beyond the present and find agency in long-term thinking. They can also practice empathy by stepping into different roles and perspectives and co-create meaningful futures by testing ideas in emotional and social contexts. And last, but definitely not least important, have fun while building critical futures literacy!

Key concepts:

Embodied storytelling: showing, not telling, what a future scenario could be.

Context-rich insight: exploring users, environments, and challenges in depth.

Empathy-building: feeling what others might experience in the future.

Collaborative sensemaking: co-creating meaning through shared performance.



TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE TELLING

Story framework

Start by creating a future scenario. Ask:

- Who is the future user?
- What are their challenges or needs?
- What is the situation? Where does it take place?
- Who else is involved?
- What message should the audience walk away with?

Role-play and script building

Create a short script with a few lines of dialogue for each character. Assign roles and encourage the use of humour, props, or emotions.

Example: A future youth leader debates AI laws in a council, while
a chatbot advocates for young people's rights.

Use of props and setting

Everyday items - such as a hoodie as a judge's robe or a phone as a translator - anchor the story and help the audience connect without needing full sets or costumes.

Live performance or recording

Act the scene out for a live audience (a group of youth, colleagues, or community members), or record it as a short film. The performance becomes both a creative expression and a learning tool.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR FUTURE TELLING

Audience reflection and feedback

After the performance, discuss:

- *What stood out or felt surprising?*
- *What seemed real or believable?*
- *What would they change or question? This reflection helps surface values, assumptions, and deeper insights.*

How does this look in practice: imaginary examples to help boost your creativity

Example 1: Future school scene

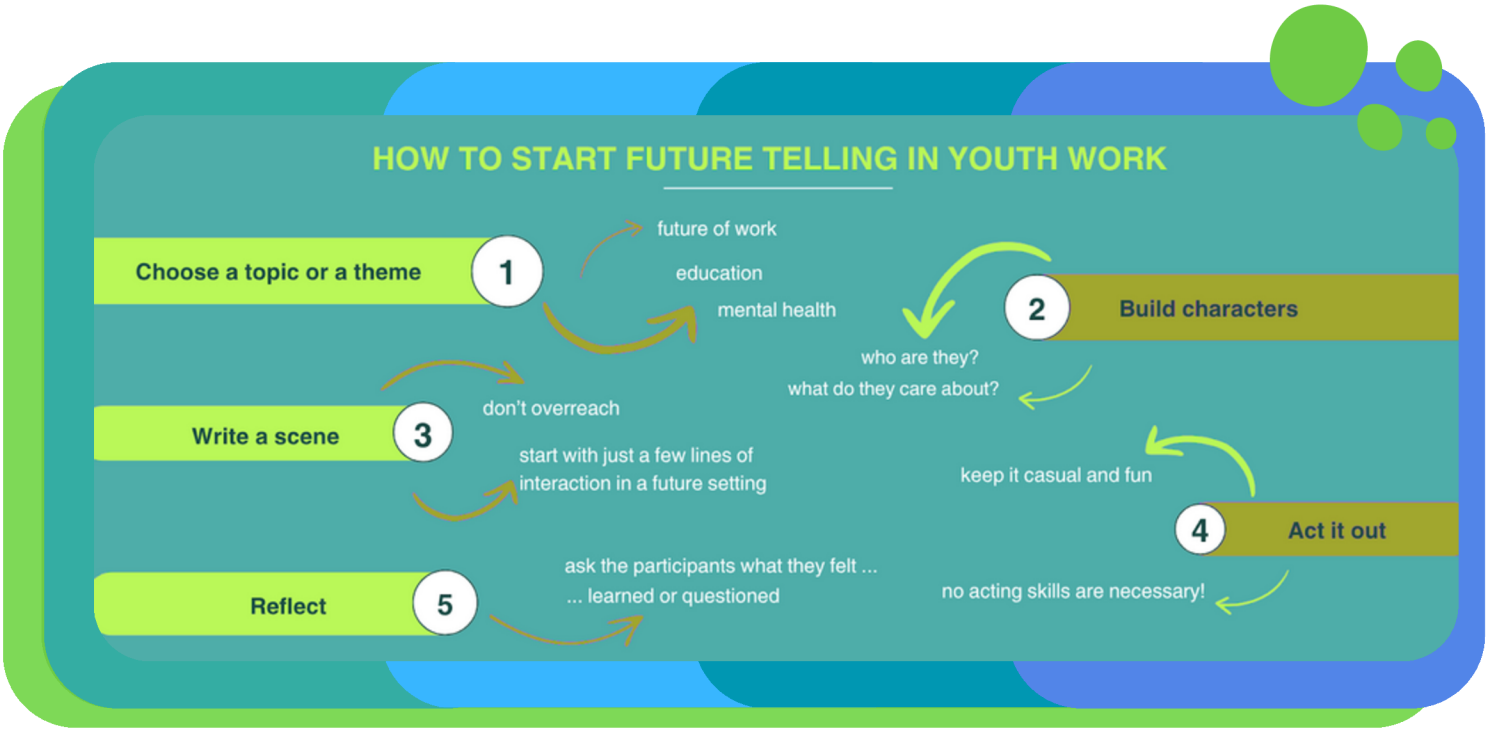
In a classroom set in 2035, teenagers role-play a scenario where AI handles teaching and learning is presented in a gamified manner. One student's character expresses rebellion by asking to learn from a human instead. During the lesson, the teacher-bot malfunctions.

Example 2: Intergenerational futures dialogue

A group of young people put on a skit at their local community centre, imagining a meeting with their future selves at age 70. They reflect on the choices they made in their 20s and how the world around them has changed. The scene blends humour with insight, as stories and lessons are shared across generations.
Outcome: Encouraging youth to think long-term and discuss future planning for their personal lives.
Future Telling scenarios can be developed on topics such as the environment, society and social relations, communication, employment, housing, active citizenship, and more. The list goes on and on!

How to start future telling in youth work

If you want to know how to start Future Telling in youth work, we're here for you! Below is a handy step-by-step guide to successfully facilitating a future-telling session.



Bonus Tip: Create a worksheet for youth to plan their scenes. Include boxes for setting, characters, goal, and key lines. This slightly more structured approach can help them to not feel overwhelmed.



Reflection Questions

What future challenges or hopes are young people in your community talking about?

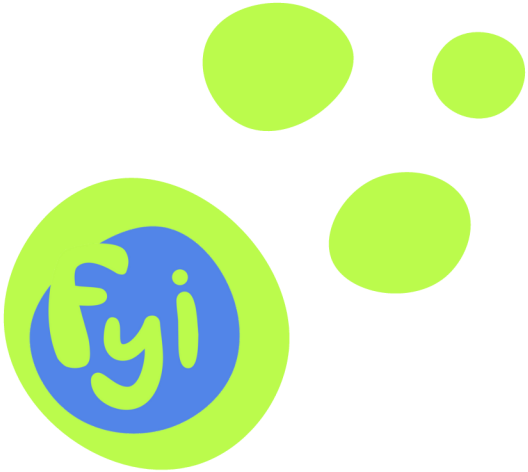
How could acting out a future scene help them express these ideas?

What themes or emotions would make the biggest impact if brought to life?

2.4 SCENARIO BUILDING

By thinking in scenarios, we move from asking "What will happen?" to "What could happen?" and "What do we want to happen?" This approach fosters critical thinking, creativity, and strategic reflection skills for young people navigating an unpredictable world. For youth work, scenario building is a powerful method to support future literacy, develop visions and empower young people to take ownership of their future.

Scenario building is a method used to explore different ways the future might unfold. Unlike forecasts - which try to predict what will happen, scenarios are not about being right. They are about imagining *possibilities*.



According to the European Commission source (see it among the references), scenario building is especially useful when:

The future feels uncertain or controversial

Long-term decisions need to be made

There is a need for resilience or innovation

You want to include different perspectives in a shared vision

EXPLORATORY SCENARIOS (WHAT COULD HAPPEN?)

These scenarios explore a range of possible futures based on current trends, emerging issues, and critical uncertainties. They do not assume any specific outcome or goal - instead, they are open-ended and used to stretch our thinking.

Exploratory scenarios are especially useful when:

- The future is highly uncertain
- You want to map the possibilities and see how things might evolve
- You want to understand how different factors might interact (e.g., climate change + tech innovation)

Scenario building is not a one-size-fits-all process. Different types of scenarios serve different purposes, some are about imagining what might happen, some are about imagining what we want to happen, and some are about testing how we respond to the unexpected. Below are the most common types used in foresight, each with its own purpose and value in youth education, planning, or activism.

They can be used in youth workshops to help participants imagine different versions of the future and identify risks or opportunities.

NORMATIVE SCENARIOS (WHAT DO WE WANT TO HAPPEN?)

Normative scenarios are based on goals: they start with a future we want and look at how to get there. They are shaped by what matters to people - like fairness, sustainability, or inclusion.. They are often used in visioning workshops where young people imagine the future they would like to live in — a sustainable city, an inclusive society, a fair education system, etc.

A notable example of the future is a 2040 scenario where all schools are free, inclusive, and shaped by student participation. Learning environments are sustainable, creative, and flexible, blending technology with hands-on, real-world experiences. In this vision, youth councils play a significant role in influencing national and EU-level policies, ensuring that young voices are central in decisions regarding education, climate, and innovation.

Normative scenarios help:

- Clarify what matters to a group or community
- Build shared visions for collective action
- Create motivational narratives around change

They are very popular in participatory foresight because they give space for imagination, dialogue, and empowerment.

DISRUPTIVE OR WILD CARD SCENARIOS (WHAT IF SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENS?)

According to the European Trade Union Institute, using different types of scenarios together can lead to stronger results. A common approach is to begin with exploratory scenarios to map out possible directions, then create normative scenarios to define the preferred future, and finally introduce disruptive or wild card scenarios to test how resilient those visions are under unexpected changes. This layered process helps build a deeper, more realistic understanding of the future.

These scenarios imagine low-probability but high-impact events that could radically change everything. They are often called "wild cards"—shocks that disrupt the system and challenge our assumptions.
This type of scenario is important because the real world is not always stable or predictable. Thinking about disruptions helps us build resilience, test the strength of our ideas, and remain flexible.

Disruptive scenarios are a great tool for youth work - they spark creativity, help young people think in new ways, and show how local actions can lead to global impact.

OVERVIEW OF SCENARIO TYPES

SCENARIO TYPE	GUIDING QUESTION	PURPOSE	WHEN TO USE	EXAMPLE
EXPLORATORY	WHAT COULD HAPPEN?	To explore a range of possible futures based on trends and uncertainties	When the future is uncertain or complex	Urbanisation accelerates, and AI reshapes the job market
NORMATIVE	WHAT DO WE WANT TO HAPPEN?	To imagine and work towards a desirable future aligned with shared values	When defining goals or creating a shared vision	Schools in 2040 are free, inclusive, tech-powered, and shaped by student voices
DISRUPTIVE / WILD CARD	WHAT IF SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENS?	To test the resilience of plans by imagining rare, high-impact events	When assessing risks or building flexibility into plans	A sudden breakthrough in clean energy or a major global water crisis

2.5 FUTURE PLANNING

Future planning is about moving from ideas to action. After exploring different future scenarios, this method helps us decide what steps to take today to move closer to the future we want.

While scenario building encourages us to think broadly, "What could happen?"- future planning brings the focus to "What can we do now?". It's about turning foresight into action.

For young people, this is where imagination meets strategy. Future planning helps connect long-term goals with everyday actions. It can guide personal decisions, community initiatives, or group projects, making change feel possible and achievable.

Tools and techniques

The following tools and techniques can help young people turn foresight into action. They can be easily used in youth work settings, group projects, and educational workshops.

Backcasting

What it is: A planning method that begins with imagining a preferred future and works backwards to identify the steps needed to reach it. It's especially useful for ambitious, long-term goals—like creating a sustainable community or achieving digital equity.

Why it's useful: Unlike forecasting, which focuses on what might happen based on current trends, backcasting starts with what we want and maps out how to get there.

Example: A youth group envisions their city in 2040 as inclusive, green, and digitally connected. Using backcasting, they outline the actions, policies, and campaigns needed in 2030, 2025, and today to realise that vision.

(See the dedicated subchapter for a deeper look at backcasting.)

Strategic visioning

What it is: Strategic visioning combines creative imagination with practical goal setting. It often begins with a visioning exercise, such as storytelling, drawing, or role-playing, and moves toward defining key actions and responsibilities.

Why it's useful: It helps young people express their ideas about the future in creative ways while also encouraging realistic planning. It's especially effective in participatory workshops or youth assemblies.

Example: Students imagine their dream school of 2040. In small teams, they break down the vision into areas like teaching, technology, wellbeing, and sustainability. Then, they list actions that could start now to move toward that future, like starting a green school club or redesigning classroom spaces.

Action pathways

What it is: Action pathways are detailed plans that outline the steps needed to transition from the current situation to a desired outcome. They include milestones, timelines, and the people or resources needed to reach each step.

Why it's useful: They help structure complex ideas and make long-term goals feel manageable. Perfect for youth projects, campaigns, or school-based initiatives.

Example: A group of young people wants to reduce plastic waste in their community by 2030. They create a timeline of yearly targets: awareness campaigns, reusable kit distribution, school partnerships, and policy advocacy. Each year builds on the last to reach the 2030 goal.

Comparison table: Future planning tools

TOOL	MAIN QUESTION	BEST FOR	EXAMPLE USE
BACKCASTING	What steps can lead us there?	Long-term goal setting; preferred future visions	Youth group plans steps for a green, digital city in 2040
STRATEGIC VISIONING	What does our ideal future look like?	Expressing creative ideas + defining priorities	Students imagine future schools and plan actions by theme
ACTION PATHWAYS	How do we get from A to B?	Breaking big plans into small steps	Timeline to reduce plastic waste through yearly community projects

Examples from practice:
Below are real-world and practice-based examples of how young people have utilised planning tools, such as backcasting, visioning, and action mapping, to shape their futures in schools, communities, and international initiatives.



UNICEF "Young Visionaries" Report

In 2024, UNICEF Innocenti supported a cohort of Youth Foresight Fellows who facilitated more than 50 workshops in 12 countries, engaging more than 800 young people (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). Participants utilised foresight tools to explore the future of children's rights in key areas, including education, work, health, privacy, and the environment, over the next 10 to 25 years.

Participants identified actionable steps needed to achieve their vision of an inclusive, rights-respecting future - moving from imagination to influence. This made the project a powerful example of how youth-led foresight can feed directly into real-world advocacy and planning.

While the first part of the process focused on scenario building - imagining how different futures might unfold - the initiative didn't stop there. Through group reflection, dialogue and backcasting-style exercises, participants translated their preferred futures into concrete recommendations and strategic policy proposals. These were compiled into the Child Rights Youth Foresight Report: Young Visionaries and shared with global stakeholders and policymakers.

"Our Future Pledge" Toolkit

Developed collaboratively by young foresight practitioners involved in UNICEF's youth foresight programs, the Our Future Pledge Toolkit is a hands-on guide for young people to explore alternative futures and take action to shape them.

The toolkit includes creative exercises for scenario development, but also goes a step further by encouraging youth to design action plans, form "future pledges", and engage in community or policy-level advocacy. These pledges are rooted in a future-oriented mindset but grounded in immediate next steps, empowering young people to begin implementing change locally.



How did they use future planning?

Young people not only imagined the futures they want - they made concrete commitments and built mini roadmaps to act on them. The toolkit bridges foresight and planning by helping youth link their ideas to timelines, responsibilities, and real-life implementation.

2.6 BACKCASTING

Backcasting is structured around a sequence of steps that guide participants from the future to the present. The method begins by collaboratively imagining a positive and plausible future in a specific domain, such as education, climate justice, or employment. Participants then work backwards to map the key milestones, strategies, and interventions that would need to occur for that future to be realised.

Backcasting is widely used in sustainability planning, civic engagement, and participatory visioning. It has been employed by municipalities, youth-led movements, and civil society groups to support inclusive, values-based future planning.

This reverse logic encourages a break from present constraints. It helps youth and facilitators explore structural change, rethink assumptions, and align present-day actions with long-term goals. Unlike linear planning, which may limit creativity by focusing only on current possibilities, backcasting empowers participants to start from aspiration and chart bold, achievable pathways.

This methodology is ideal for workshops, local planning processes, and school or youth organisation settings where goal-oriented and creative collaboration is encouraged.

HOW IT ENCOURAGES IMAGINATIVE AND STRATEGIC THINKING

Backcasting encourages participants to think in both expansive and grounded ways. The first stage, "developing a shared vision", requires imagination and aspiration. Participants are invited to articulate what a "better future" looks like, what values it upholds, and what changes have taken place. This process strengthens youth voice, optimism, and future literacy.

Moreover, this process naturally encourages collaboration. Youth must co-create a future they agree on, negotiate priorities, and decide on concrete, feasible steps, thus strengthening leadership and collective decision-making skills.

Because it starts with the desired outcome, backcasting helps prevent tunnel vision. It allows youth to challenge the status quo, recognise current limitations, and propose transformative solutions instead of settling for minor adjustments (Robinson, 2003).

The following stages of the methodology ask participants to reverse-engineer a pathway to this future. This process supports systems thinking, strategic awareness, and planning skills.
Participants must consider:

- *What had to change?*
- *What decisions were made?*
- *Who needed to be involved?*
- *What obstacles were overcome?*

HOW IS IT STRUCTURED? A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Backcasting exercises are highly adaptable in terms of length and format. A typical workshop lasts 90 to 120 minutes, but can be extended over multiple sessions for deeper planning.

The process generally unfolds in five key steps:

1. Future visioning (20-30 minutes)

Participants work individually or in small groups to imagine a desirable future. This could relate to a specific theme (e.g. equitable education). The vision should be detailed and value-based. What has changed? Who benefits? What systems are in place?

2. Identifying key milestones (20 minutes)

Starting from the envisioned future, participants move backwards in time. They identify major changes or breakthroughs that would have had to occur. These might include new policies, social movements, innovations, or mindset shifts.

3. Mapping the pathway (25-30 minutes)

Participants outline a timeline or roadmap showing how the milestones could realistically unfold. They discuss necessary actions, responsible actors, needed resources, and challenges to overcome.



4. Present-day action planning (15-20 minutes)

Groups reflect on what can be done now to begin the journey. This includes identifying small but strategic steps, potential allies, and immediate opportunities to influence change.

5. Group reflection and sharing (10-15 minutes)

Each group presents its vision and pathway. Participants reflect on insights gained, potential applications, and how the exercise shifted their understanding of agency, planning, and possibility.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES AND APPLICATIONS

Backcasting is especially powerful when applied to real-world contexts that require transformative thinking. Below are some examples where youth groups and organizations have used this methodology effectively.

In 2013, at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, 200 Young Global Leaders gathered for a Planetary Congress to use backcasting as a tool for envisioning a more sustainable and equitable future. Guided by experts in fields such as governance, health, media, and the environment, participants imagined the world in 2025 and worked backwards to identify the actions needed to achieve their vision. The process revealed the deep interconnections between global systems and emphasised the importance of collaboration across sectors and generations. Since they started from an ideal future rather than present limitations, the exercise demonstrated how backcasting can inspire practical strategies to address complex global challenges.

A recent educational intervention in the Azores tested backcasting with secondary school students to foster sustainability thinking. After visiting a biodiverse local forest, students were guided through a backcasting exercise to imagine its future 30 years ahead and develop strategic plans to achieve their preferred vision. Despite challenges in articulating complex solutions and linking present actions to long-term goals, participants valued the method's active and participatory nature. The exercise promoted critical and hypothetical thinking and highlighted how backcasting can support education for sustainable development by encouraging systems awareness, creativity, and civic responsibility among youth.

TO WRAP THINGS UP...

To wrap up this subchapter, backcasting is a method which cultivates essential future competencies by combining creativity, strategy, and action. It encourages young people to think systematically about how social, political, technological, and environmental factors interact over time, building systems awareness and strategic thinking. By imagining bold futures and mapping the steps to reach them, it balances aspiration with feasibility and reinforces a sense of agency through action planning.

Its collaborative nature supports leadership and communication skills, while reflection deepens ethical awareness and self-understanding, contributing to the holistic development of confident, future-ready changemakers. In an age of uncertainty, backcasting offers youth the chance to reverse the script. Instead of just reacting, they learn to shape the future by combining a clear vision with practical steps.



2.7 FUTURES WHEEL

Developed by futurist Jerome C. Glenn in 1971, it offers a structured way for individuals or groups to brainstorm the potential impacts of a specific event or development. It shows how one central change can trigger a web of secondary and tertiary effects—some beneficial, others unexpected or even disruptive. Simple yet powerful, the Futures Wheel encourages systems thinking, critical foresight, and inclusive dialogue.

While some foresight tools focus on long-term visions or strategic pathways, others help us understand the ripple effects of specific changes. The Futures Wheel is one such method—a visual and collaborative tool for exploring the direct and indirect consequences of emerging trends, innovations, or decisions.

In youth settings, the Futures Wheel is especially effective because it combines abstract reasoning with visual mapping. It invites young people to creatively explore the chain reactions of change, while grounding their thinking in structured analysis. It helps answer the question: If this happens, then what? And what comes after that?

Purpose of the futures wheel in analysing future impacts

The primary purpose of the Futures Wheel is to uncover the ripple effects of change. When a new trend, idea, or policy emerges, its implications are rarely confined to a single area. The Futures Wheel helps make these cascading effects visible. It is useful for:

- Anticipating both positive and negative consequences of change
- Exploring complex interdependencies across systems (social, technological, environmental, economic)
- Supporting decision-making and planning by clarifying potential outcomes
- Encouraging reflection on ethical, cultural, and long-term considerations

In youth work, the Futures Wheel can empower young people to better understand how today's changes, whether a local policy decision or a global technological shift, may shape their lives and communities in unexpected ways. It also reinforces the idea that every action has multiple consequences, many of which unfold over time and affect others beyond the immediate circle of impact.

For example, suppose a city decides to implement a new youth digital engagement platform. In that case, the futures wheel might help participants explore not only the intended outcome (better youth participation), but also secondary consequences (digital divide, increased data collection), and third-order effects (shifts in civic identity, new political behaviours).

How to create and interpret a futures wheel

1. Define the central change or Event

Start with a specific change, innovation, or trend. This could be something that has already occurred or a projected development. Examples include the rise of artificial intelligence in education, a national policy on climate action, or a shift in local youth employment programs. This central idea is placed in the centre of the page or board.

2. Identify first-order impacts

Ask participants: What are the immediate effects of this change? These first-order impacts are placed in a ring around the central idea. They might include changes in behaviour, opportunities, risks, or resource needs. Encourage open brainstorming and avoid filtering ideas too early.

3. Identify second-order impacts

Next, explore the consequences of the first-order impacts. What might happen as a result of those initial changes? These are second-order impacts, placed in a second outer ring. Participants begin to think more systemically and recognise that even small shifts can lead to broader transformations.

4. Add third-order impacts (Optional)

Ask participants: What are the immediate effects of this change? These first-order impacts are placed in a ring around the central idea. They might include changes in behaviour, opportunities, risks, or resource needs. Encourage open brainstorming and avoid filtering ideas too early.

5. Analyse and reflect

Once the wheel is complete, take time to discuss:

Once the wheel is complete, take time to discuss:

- Which impacts are most desirable or concerning?
- What unintended consequences emerged?
- How are the effects interconnected?
- What opportunities or challenges arise from these outcomes?

Facilitators can also use colour coding or symbols to differentiate between positive, negative, and uncertain effects. This visual clarity helps participants reflect critically and identify patterns.

The final Futures Wheel is not a predictive tool. Rather, it is a thinking map - a way to explore possibilities, stretch perspectives, and support better decision-making by visualising complexity.

Practical application and real-world examples

The Futures Wheel has been used across sectors to support strategic foresight and participatory planning. Its versatility and accessibility make it especially suitable for youth work, where visual and collaborative methods enhance engagement and understanding.

This is what a futures wheel looks like:

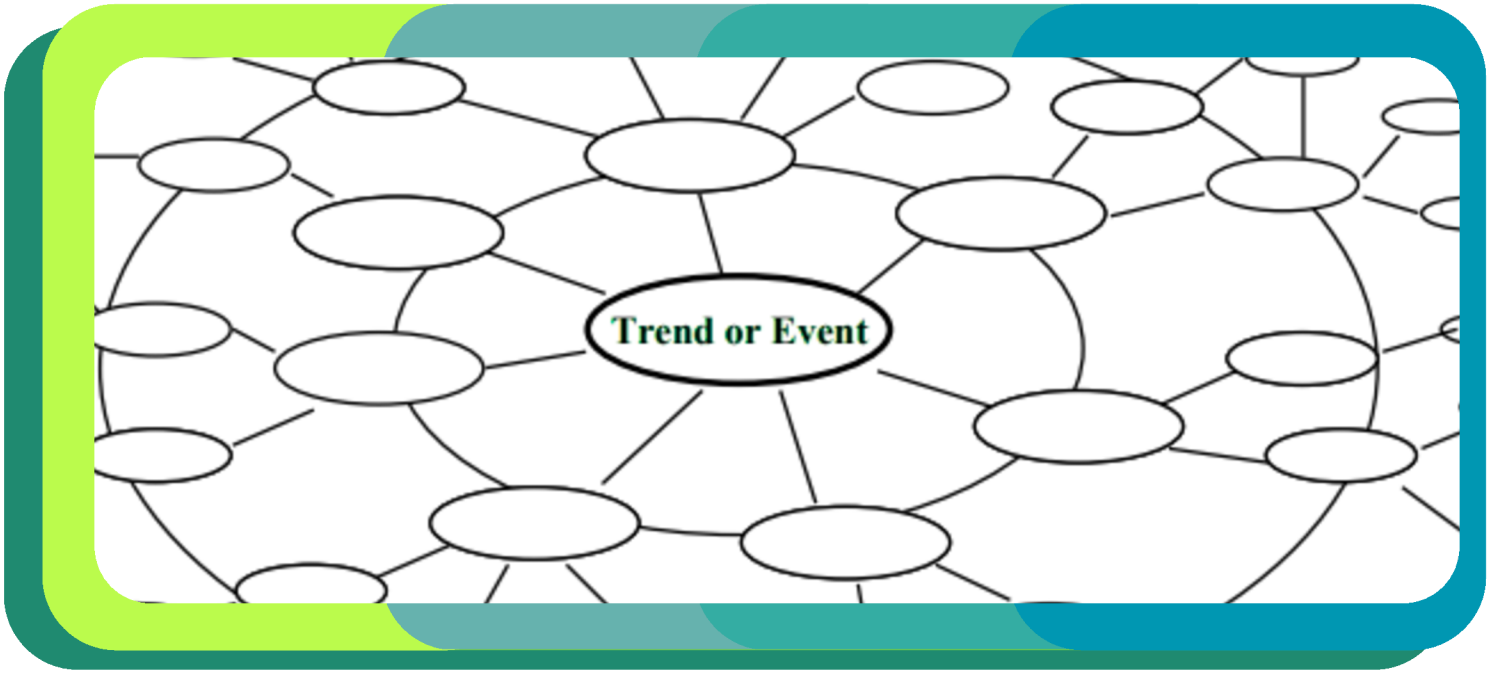


Figure 4: Basic Futures Wheel. Source: The Futures Wheel, by J. C. Glenn, 2021, in Futures Research Methodology—Version 3.0, The Millennium Project.

Once the trend/event to be explored is decided, the participants draw ovals that represent the primary impacts of it:

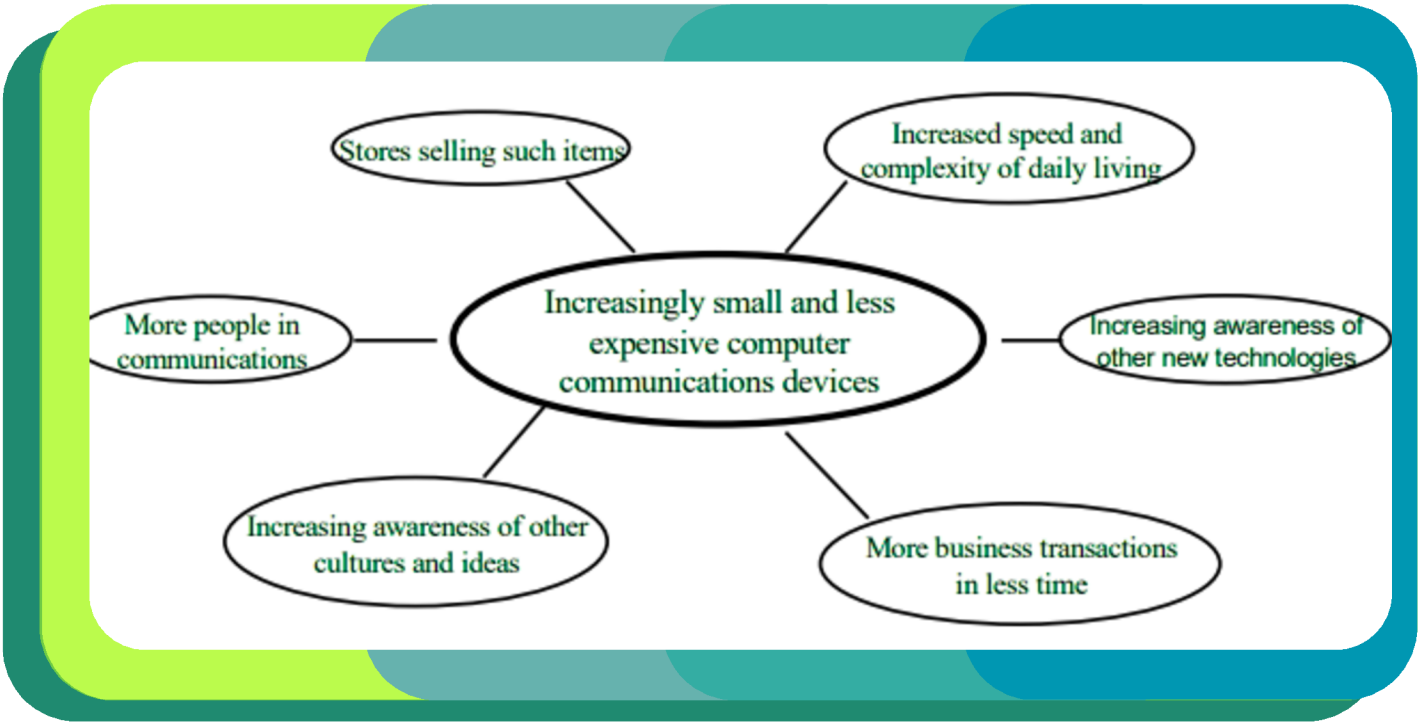


Figure 5: Example of primary impacts of a trend. Source: The Futures Wheel, by J. C. Glenn, 2021, in Futures Research Methodology / Version 3.0, The Millennium Project.

After that, the group stops thinking about the original idea at the centre of the Futures Wheel. Instead, they should now think about what might happen due to each main effect. As the group shares these follow-up effects, two or three short lines from each main effect are drawn and written at the end of the lines.

Optionally, the participants can proceed with the third-order impacts.

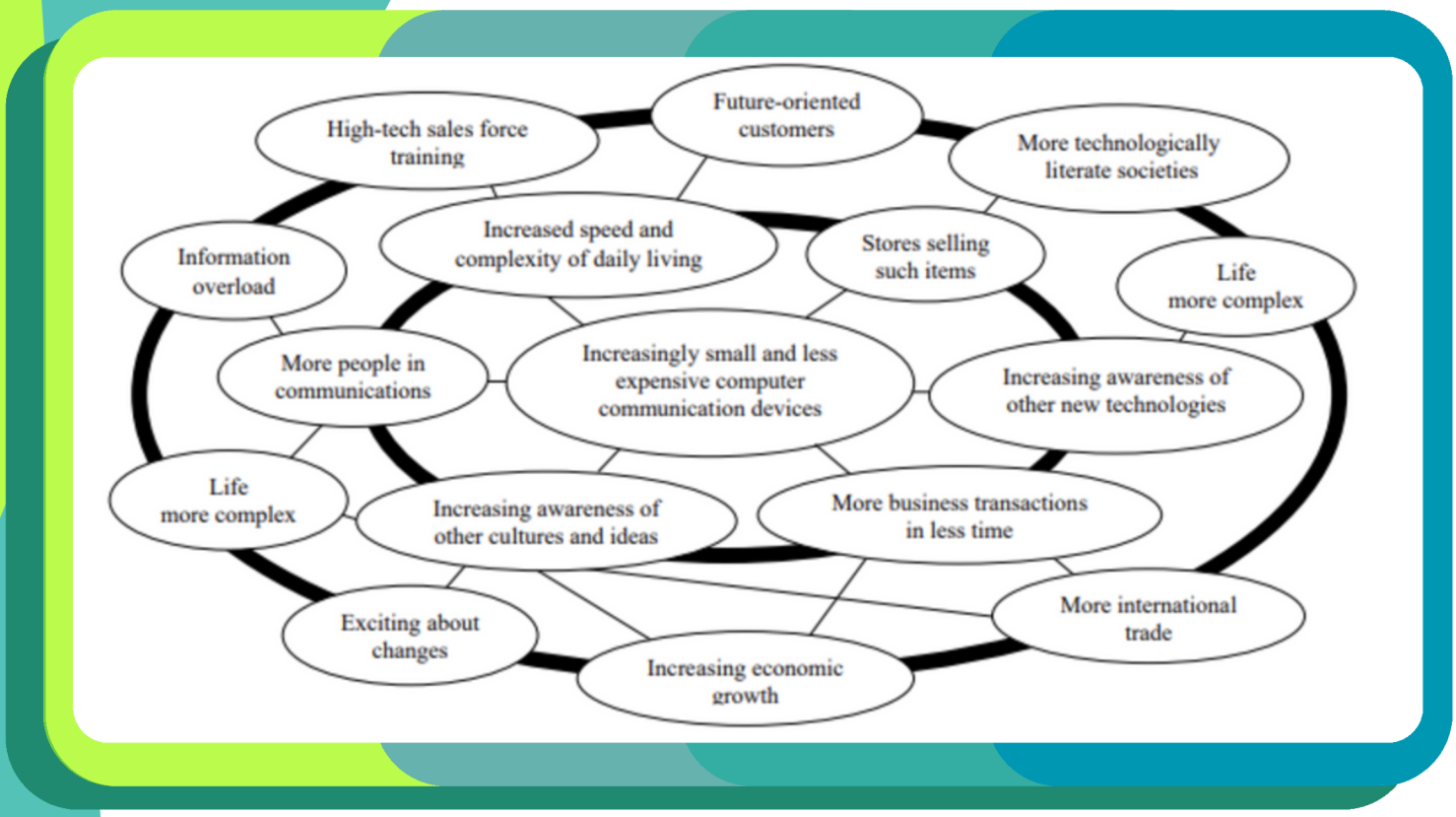


Figure 6: Example of primary and secondary impacts of a trend. Source: The Futures Wheel, by J. C. Glenn, 2021, in Futures Research Methodology - Version 3.0, The Millennium Project.

TO WRAP THINGS UP...

The above-mentioned examples show how the Futures Wheel helps young people uncover layers of complexity behind everyday changes. It trains them to ask not just what happens next, but what might happen because of that. As a practical, visual method, it helps young people explore the consequences of change with both depth and creativity. Along the way, it nurtures systems thinking, encourages ethical reflection, and builds collaborative problem-solving - skills that are increasingly vital in today's fast-changing world.

Whether applied in a classroom, a community centre, or a policy workshop, the Futures Wheel offers a dynamic space for critical thinking, stronger connections, and more informed, thoughtful decision-making about the future they are helping to create.



2.8 DETECTIVES OF THE FUTURE: **A METHODOLOGY FOR HORIZON SCANNING**

Detectives of the Future (rooted in horizon scanning) is an interactive foresight method that encourages participants to adopt the perspective of a detective. The process emulates actual detective work by asking young people or other stakeholders to identify "signs of new," such as news headlines, local innovations, and emerging policies. Participants then connect these signs to recognise change signals and emerging trends.

Once again, about horizon scanning?

Horizon scanning, also known as environmental scanning, is the process of systematically observing early signs of change, including emerging issues, weak signals, and trends across various fields such as technology, society, the environment, and politics. While it does not predict the future, it helps expand awareness of potential developments. Horizon Scanning is often used as a foundation for other methods, such as futures wheels and scenario building.

How It encourages critical thinking and creative foresight

One of the key strengths of Detectives of the Future is its ability to develop essential future literacy skills.

It begins with strengthening critical thinking. Participants are encouraged to look beneath the surface of current events and news stories, questioning the information they receive and examining different perspectives. Rather than rushing to conclusions, they learn to recognise personal biases and reflect on their own assumptions.

This process builds greater awareness of how patterns are formed - whether they are based on real signals or shaped by selective attention and prejudice. As the Youth4Foresight Toolkit highlights, such critical analysis helps young people become more thoughtful, informed, and reflective in their engagement with the world around them.



The methodology also nurtures creative foresight. As participants group and label trends, they are encouraged to imagine and describe change in original ways. Rather than using broad terms like "technology" or "education", they are prompted to pinpoint more specific dynamics, such as "growing ethical debates around AI" or "youth-led innovation in rural learning". This approach calls for both imagination and interpretation, combining thoughtful analysis with a creative mindset.

Finally, the collaborative and step-by-step nature of this initiative supports a rich systems thinking approach. Participants take part in open discussions where they learn to spot and link subtle signals that point to broader societal shifts. They begin to see how technology, the environment, culture and politics are interconnected (Systems Innovation, 2019).

Through this process, Detectives of the Future encourages a form of strategic thinking that is both grounded in real-world complexity and fuelled by imagination. It gives participants the tools to explore bold, creative responses to the challenges of an uncertain future.

HOW IS IT STRUCTURED?
A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

This exercise usually takes between 90 and 120 minutes. However, you can adapt it to suit the size, age and needs of your group, as well as the time you have available.

1

INDIVIDUAL READING (15 MINUTES)

Participants review a curated selection of "signs of new"—short headlines or articles reflecting societal developments. They consider emerging patterns and underlying causes.

2

GROUP REFLECTION (15-20 MINUTES)

Participants share their observations in small groups and discuss which developments seem significant or surprising

3

CLUSTERING AND NAMING (20-25 MINUTES)

Groups cluster their signs into thematic groupings and name each cluster using descriptive language focused on what is changing.

4

SHARING INSIGHTS (20 MINUTES)

Each group presents its findings, offering insights into key trends, emerging dynamics, and possible implications.

5

FINAL REFLECTIONS (10-15 MINUTES

Participants reflect on their learning, assessing their capacity to notice weak signals and apply this new way of thinking in their personal or professional lives.

A notable example can be seen in Ethiopia, where members of the Youth Sounding Board took part in a hybrid workshop. Although they faced some technical challenges, such as internet connectivity issues and limited experience with digital tools, the overall feedback was very positive. Participants shared that the session helped them engage more deeply with current developments in their own region and identify possible drivers of change. The experience shifted their perspective from simply receiving information to thinking more critically and reflectively about the future.

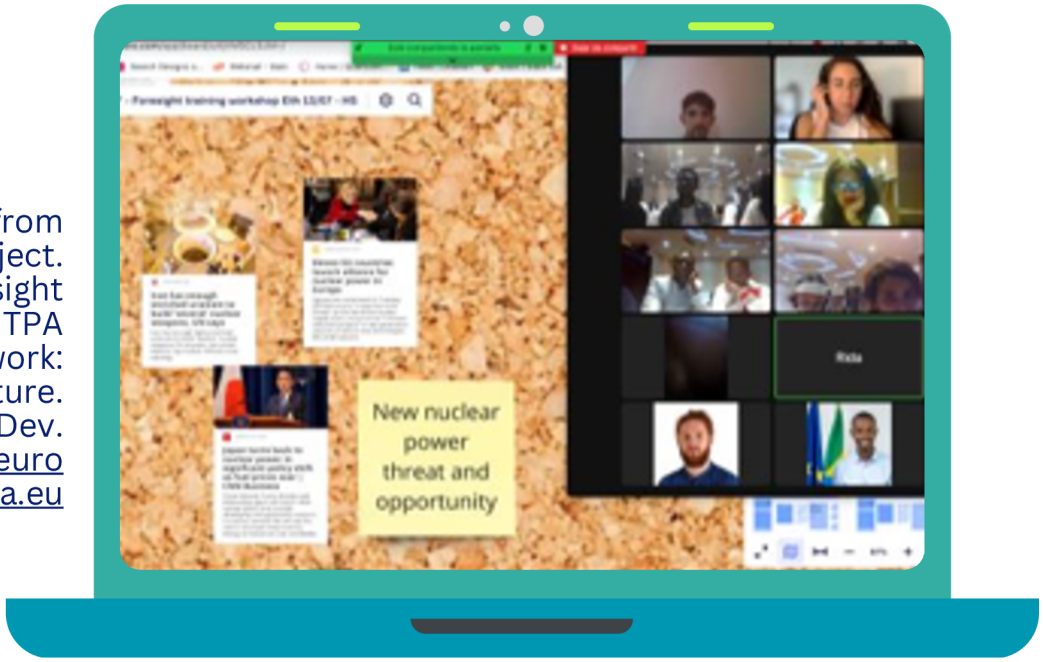


Figure 7: A snippet from the Ethiopian project. Source: Youth4Foresight Toolkit. (2024). INTPA Foresight Hub Network: Detectives of the Future. Capacity4Dev. https://capacity4dev.europa.eu

In addition to its current applications, youth thematic committees can adopt this methodology consistently, whether monthly or quarterly, to effectively monitor and assess changes within their designated areas of focus, which may include critical issues such as education, climate change, and digital participation. By conducting regular evaluations, these committees can gather valuable insights that inform their strategies and initiatives.

Schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also apply this methodology in classroom settings or workshops, helping students develop a deeper understanding of key concepts such as media literacy and futures thinking. This hands-on approach gives young people the tools to navigate today's complex information landscape and encourages them to consider their role in shaping future developments in society.

Local governments can further enrich participatory planning processes by incorporating this methodology into consultations that engage youth. Doing so ensures that innovative and forward-thinking perspectives from younger generations are integrated into policy development. This collaboration not only fosters a sense of ownership among youth but also leads to more relevant and responsive policies that address the community's needs and aspirations. Overall, the systematic use of this methodology across different sectors can significantly enhance dialogue, learning, and growth among youth, educators, NGOs, and local government officials.

TO WRAP THINGS UP...

Detectives of the Future is a flexible and engaging foresight method that is accessible to all. It introduces practical tools and encourages a mindset of curiosity, awareness and readiness for change.

In a world where uncertainty is part of daily life, these skills are not just useful – they are essential. This methodology can be used as a one-off workshop or as part of regular horizon scanning practice. It offers an easy entry point into strategic foresight and, more importantly, helps to nurture thoughtful, creative and future-ready citizens



2.9 2X2 MATRIX

The 2x2 matrix is a dynamic and experiential method that invites young people to explore and design alternative futures in a structured yet creative way. Participants work collaboratively to identify two critical uncertainties as key drivers of change whose outcomes are highly unpredictable, and use them to create four distinct future scenarios. Each scenario reflects a different combination of how these uncertainties could unfold, encouraging participants to imagine a wide range of possibilities.

Young people engage in a process of scanning their environment, recognising patterns, and interpreting signals of change. Once the key uncertainties are identified, participants position them on a horizontal and vertical axis to build a 2x2 matrix. This simple visual framework serves as the foundation for storytelling, strategic thinking, and a deeper understanding of complex systems.

The 2x2 matrix methodology is rooted in the principles of exploratory scenario development, a proactive foresight approach that moves beyond prediction to embrace uncertainty. Rather than attempting to forecast a single future, this method invites and challenges participants to expand their perspectives, explore multiple plausible futures, and also consider how today's actions might influence tomorrow's outcomes. By doing so, young people not only build critical thinking and creativity, but also develop resilience and adaptability - essential skills for navigating our rapidly changing world.

This method is widely used in future literacy initiatives, strategic foresight exercises, and educational workshops. It is especially effective within youth advisory bodies, schools, municipalities, and civil society organisations that aim to empower young people to take an active role in shaping future policies, communities, and innovations.

HOW TO DEFINE KEY UNCERTAINTIES AND PLOT THEM IN A MATRIX: A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

1 CORE QUESTION

To start the 2x2 matrix process, you first need to determine the core question you want to investigate. This question sets the focus for your future exploration. It is important for the topic to be clear, as well as for the participants to set a time horizon. This gives them a clear frame for their imagination and thinking, while at the same time making the scenarios more grounded and practical. An example question: "What futures might young people face in civic participation by 2035?“

2 DRIVING FORCES

Continue with scanning the operational environment and searching for driving forces - factors that could influence the future of the topic. Look for emerging trends, early signals of change, uncertainties, shifts in technology, society, politics, environment, and economy. For instance, during a youth participation workshop, participants might explore drivers that include increasing mistrust in political institutions, rise of decentralised digital networks, expanding role of AI in decision-making.

3 TWO KEY DRIVERS

Next, identify two critical uncertainties. From the collected drivers, choose the two most critical uncertainties. Remember, they must be highly impactful (they could dramatically shape the future) and highly uncertain (their future direction is unpredictable).

In our example, two critical uncertainties might be:

Driver 1 - Level of youth trust in institutions (High ⇔ Low)

Driver 2 - Regulation of digital civic platforms (Strict ⇔ Open)

These two uncertainties will become the foundation of our 2x2 Matrix.

4 EXTREME OPPOSING ENDS

Knowing the drivers, it is time to define the extreme opposing ends of each uncertainty. Each uncertainty should be described along a spectrum with two clear and extreme ends.

In our case, for youth trust, we have:
strong confidence in institutions ⇿ Deep scepticism and distrust; and for digital platform regulation, we have: heavy government oversight ⇿ Total freedom and decentralisation.
This step ensures that the resulting scenarios will be distinct and stimulating.

5 CREATE THE MATRIX (OR USE THE TEMPLATE PROVIDED)

Draw two crossing axes on a large sheet or board. Label one axis with the first uncertainty and its two extreme ends. Then label the second axis with the second uncertainty and its two ends. In this way, you will create four quadrants, each representing a different combination of outcomes.

6 DESCRIBE THE SCENARIOS

Develop and name the scenarios. Ask the participants to imagine what each quadrant's future could look like and to describe shortly the main message of each scenario. Once scenarios are ready, invite the participants to name them so that the title clearly shows the specific and unique characteristics of this scenario.

In our example, participants can create short descriptions answering:

- What kind of youth participation happens?
- What challenges or opportunities exist?
- How do social, political, or technological dynamics evolve?

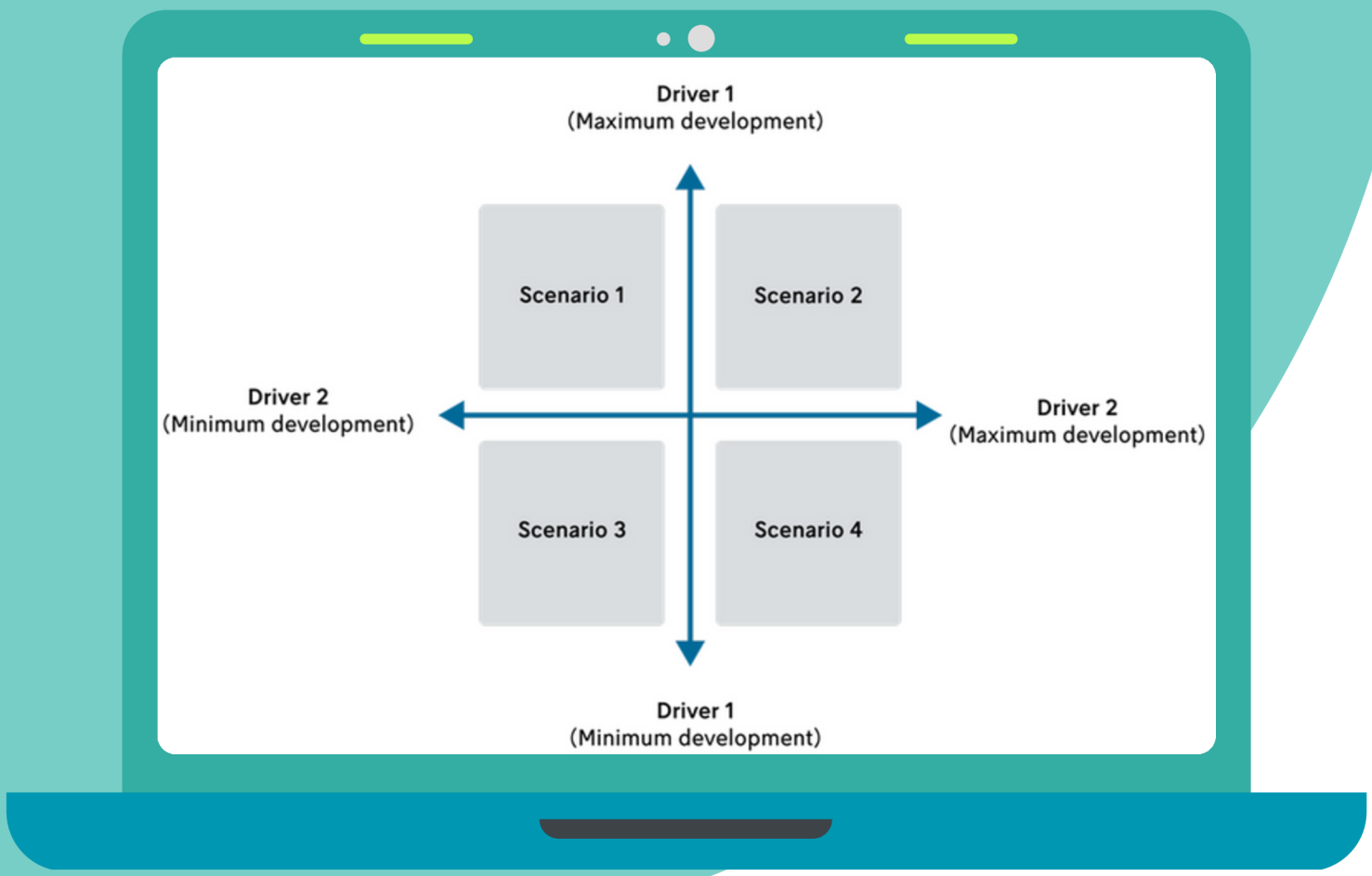


Figure 8: Example 2x2 scenario planning matrix
Source: Futures Platform.
https://www.futuresplatform.com/blog/2x2-scenario-planning-matrix-guideline

CREATIVE NAMES HELP MAKE EACH SCENARIO VIVID AND MEMORABLE

	STRICT DIGITAL REGULATION	OPEN DIGITAL PLATFORMS
HIGH YOUTH TRUST	Structured Civic Participation	Platform-Led Youth Movements
LOW YOUTH TRUST	Guarded Participation	Digital Rebellions



DESCRIBE THE SCENARIOS

This method could be valuable and applicable on different levels and in various settings. Youth groups can integrate the 2x2 matrix into their ongoing work, holding quarterly scenario-building sessions to monitor and reassess emerging changes across focus areas like education, climate action, youth employment, and technology governance. Regular use of the matrix not only sharpens foresight skills but also strengthens strategic discussions and planning processes.
Schools and NGOs can implement the 2x2 matrix within project-based learning, future thinking workshops, or civic education classes.

Encouraging students to map out alternative futures develops their systems thinking, media literacy, and strategic creativity - critical skills for navigating an increasingly complex world. Local governments can also enrich participatory processes by incorporating the 2x2 matrix into youth consultations and visioning exercises. Involving young people in structured scenario exploration helps ensure that policies are informed by diverse, forward-looking perspectives and fosters a stronger sense of youth ownership and civic engagement

Overall, the systematic use of the 2x2 matrix across sectors can significantly enhance future literacy, dialogue, and agency among young people, educators, NGOs, and policymakers alike - laying the groundwork for more resilient, inclusive, and innovative futures.

TO WRAP THINGS UP...

The 2x2 matrix is a practical, creative tool that helps young people move from spotting signals of change to building structured, diverse future scenarios. By working through these simple steps, they develop a deeper understanding of change and uncertainty - and how today’s choices might shape tomorrow's world. The tool reminds us that the future is not fixed; there are multiple futures, and our current actions shape our own.



2.10 OTHER FORESIGHT METHODOLOGIES

While core methods like Future Telling and Scenario Building form the backbone of many foresight activities in youth work, several other techniques offer unique perspectives and capabilities. Understanding these additional tools allows you, as a youth worker, to tailor your approach even more effectively, tackle different types of future-oriented questions, and enrich the learning experience for young people.

This chapter, therefore, explores a selection of these methods: the expert-driven Delphi technique, the surprise-focused wild cards and weak signals, the common practice of focusing on a few key Scenarios, and the interconnectedness revealed by Cross-Impact Analysis. We'll examine what they are, how they work, and, importantly, how they can be adapted and applied in engaging ways within youth work settings.

DELPHI METHOD: TAPPING INTO COLLECTIVE WISDOM

The Delphi method is a structured way to gather opinions and work towards consensus among a group of knowledgeable individuals (often called 'experts') on a specific topic, without them needing to meet face-to-face. It uses multiple rounds of questionnaires, with feedback provided between rounds. The core idea is that collective, structured judgment is often more accurate than individual opinions, especially for complex or uncertain topics.

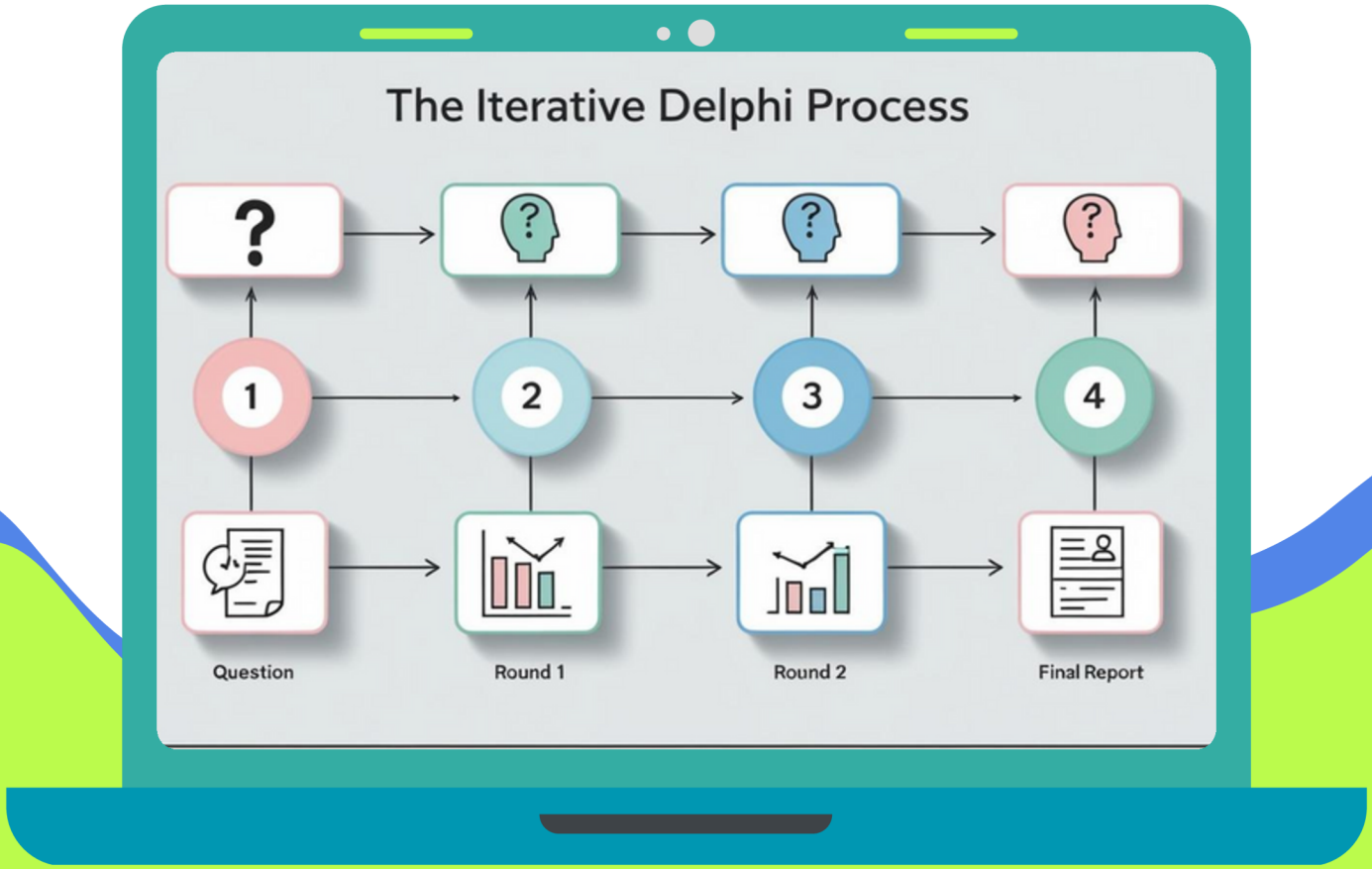


Figure 9: The iterative Delphi process Source: author.

HOW IT WORKS (TRADITIONAL):

Identify the issue & select experts:
Clearly define the question or forecast needed. Select a diverse panel of experts relevant to the topic.

Round 1 questionnaire:
Send an open-ended questionnaire to the experts, asking for their initial opinions, forecasts, or ideas.

Analyse & summarise:
Collect the anonymous responses. Identify key themes, arguments, and areas of agreement or disagreement.

Round 2 questionnaire:
Send a new questionnaire that includes a summary of Round 1 results (anonymously).

Ask experts to review the summary and revise their initial opinions, providing reasons for their views, especially if they differ significantly from the group average.



Repeat analysis & feedback:
repeat steps 3 and 4 for one or more rounds. The goal is to see if opinions converge towards a consensus or if distinct viewpoints remain stable.

Final report:
Summarise the final results, highlighting the level of consensus, key insights, and remaining disagreements.

ADAPTING FOR YOUTH WORK:

While traditionally using formal experts, Delphi can be adapted:

- **Local "experts":** Instead of academics, use community leaders, local business owners, experienced youth workers, or even older youth with specific knowledge (e.g., on local environmental issues, youth employment trends).
- **Focus on priorities:** Use it to help a youth council or project group prioritise issues or potential solutions. Ask questions like, "What are the most important challenges facing young people in our town in the next 5 years?" or "Which actions should our group focus on?"
- **Simplified feedback**: Instead of complex statistical summaries, provide qualitative summaries of key arguments from the previous round.
- **Digital tools:** Use online survey tools (like Google Forms, SurveyMonkey) or even structured email rounds to manage the process easily and maintain anonymity.
- **Combine with discussion:** Use the Delphi results as a starting point for a face-to-face workshop to discuss the areas of agreement and disagreement identified.



WHEN & WHY IS USEFUL FOR YOUTH WORK:

- **Gathering diverse views:** Useful when you want structured input from various stakeholders on youth issues without the pressure of face-to-face debate influencing opinions.
- **Prioritisation:** Helps groups make collective decisions on priorities when resources are limited.
- **Developing a shared understanding:** This can clarify different perspectives on a complex issue affecting young people.
- **Empowering youth voice (adapted)**: When youth themselves act as the 'experts' on their own experiences and perspectives, it validates their knowledge.

WILD CARDS & WEAK SIGNALS: PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Wild Cards refer to specific, imagined future events that have a low probability of occurring but could have a very high impact if they do happen. These events can include major technological breakthroughs, sudden environmental crises, unexpected political shifts, social upheavals or any situation that can significantly alter circumstances.

In contrast, weak signals are subtle, often ambiguous clues that may suggest a significant change or the potential emergence of a wild card. Since they do not align with our current mental models, weak signals are easily overlooked or dismissed. They tend to be surprising and often challenge existing assumptions.

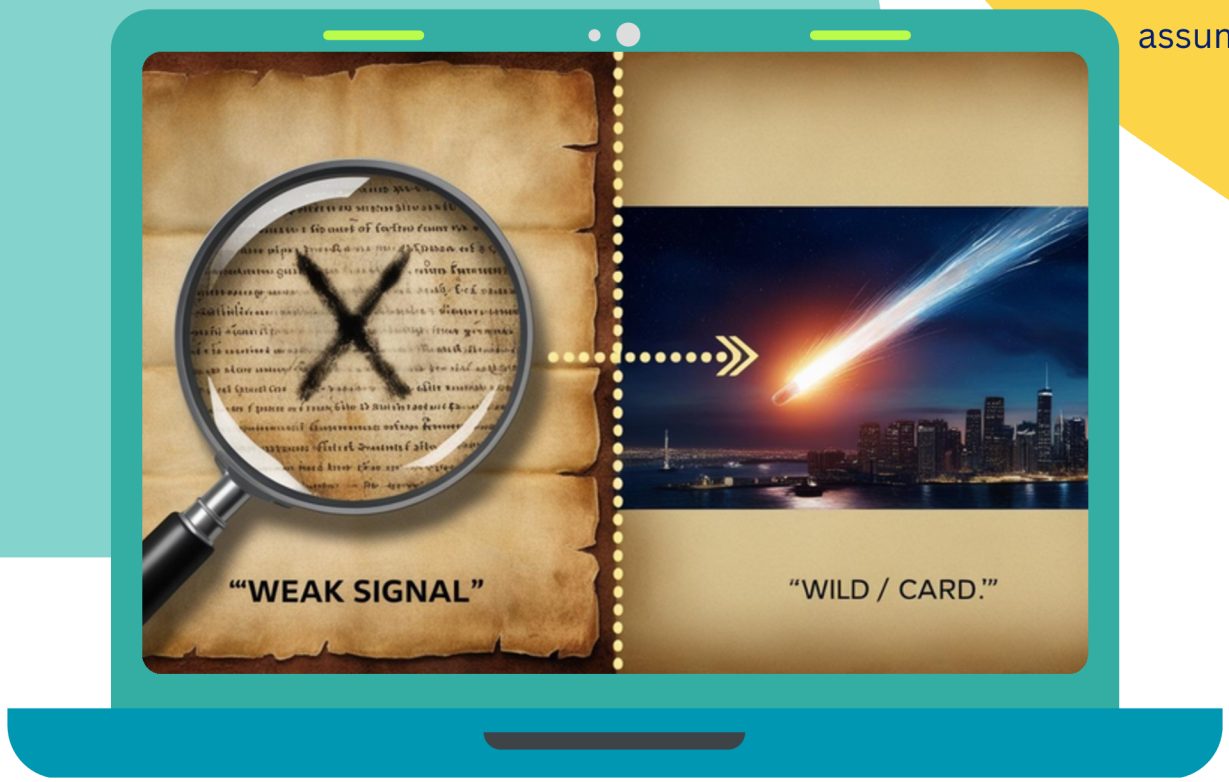


Figure 10: Weak signal and wild card illustration Source: author.

HOW IT WORKS:

1 **Scanning for anomalies (Weak Signals):** Encourage young people (and yourself) to actively look for things that seem surprising, strange, counter-intuitive, or out of place in the news, social media, technology, arts, or everyday life. Ask: "What have you seen recently that made you think, 'Huh, that's weird' or 'I didn't expect that'?"

2 **Interpreting signals:** Discuss these weak signals. What could they mean? What larger change might they be hinting at? Don't jump to conclusions; explore multiple interpretations.

3 **Imagining wild cards:** Based on the signals or broader trends, brainstorm potential high-impact, low-probability events relevant to the group's focus (e.g., "What if basic internet access became free for everyone overnight?", "What if a new youth movement emerged globally, bypassing traditional politics?").

4 **Exploring impacts:** For a chosen wild card, use methods like the futures wheel or simple discussion to explore the potential consequences, both positive and negative. How would it affect young people? What new challenges or opportunities would arise?

5 **Building resilience:** Discuss how the group, community, or individuals could prepare for or respond to such unexpected events. What skills or resources would be needed?

- **Balance with positive surprises:** Don't just focus on negative disruptions; explore positive wild cards too (e.g., a sudden cure for a major disease, a breakthrough in sustainable energy).
- **Link to creativity:** Use wild cards as prompts for creative writing, art, or Future Telling scenarios.

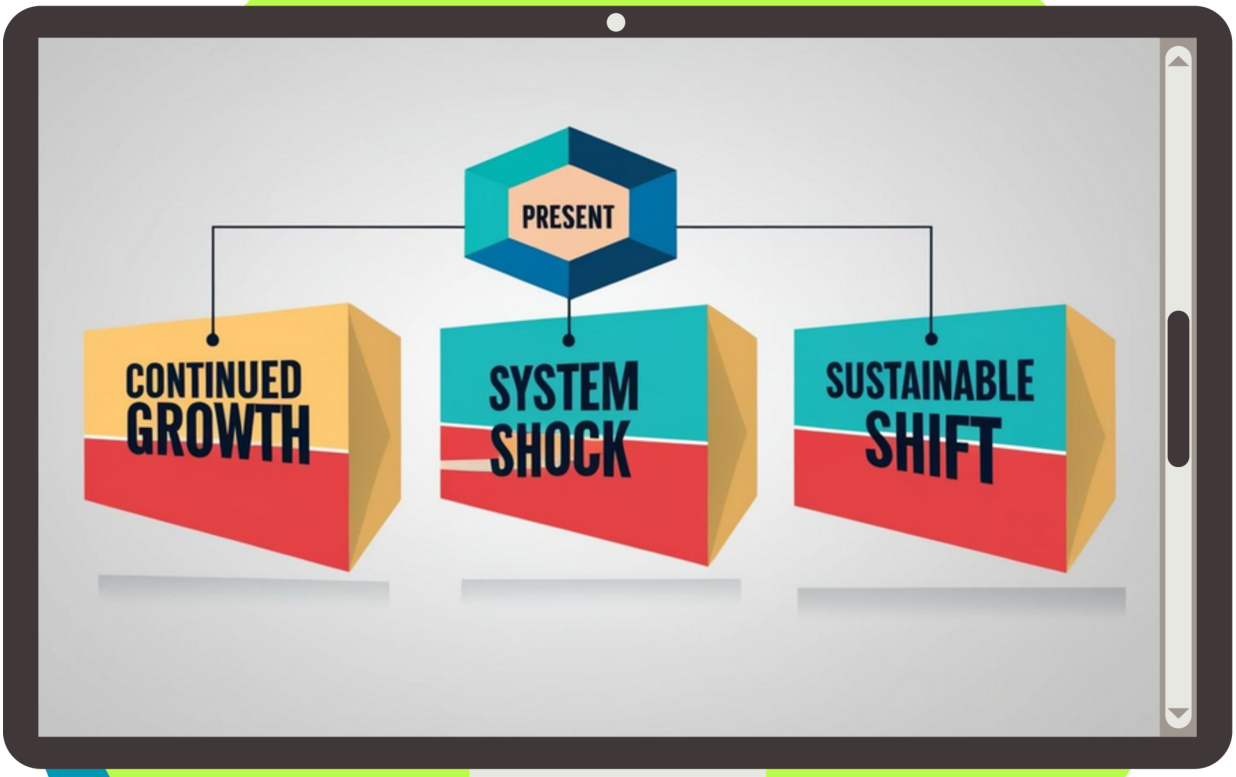
ADAPTING FOR YOUTH WORK:

- **Make it a game:** Frame "Weak Signal spotting" as a fun detective game or a "Future News" activity.
- **Focus on relevance:** Ensure the Wild Cards imagined are relevant to young people's lives and interests (e.g., future of education, social connection, local community).

WHEN & WHY USEFUL FOR YOUTH WORK:

- Stimulating creativity: Imagining radical shifts can spark innovative ideas and solutions.
- Risk awareness: Helps groups consider potential vulnerabilities and how to mitigate them, without being overly alarmist.
- Challenging assumptions: Shakes up linear thinking and helps youth understand that the future isn't always a straight line from the present.
- Building adaptability: Encourages thinking about flexibility and responsiveness in the face of the unexpected.

3 "SCENARIOS?": FOCUSING ON THE EXPLORATION



This isn't a distinct foresight method like Delphi or horizon scanning. Instead, it refers to a common and practical approach within scenario building: deliberately developing a small, manageable number (often 3 or 4) of distinct and contrasting scenarios to explore the future, rather than getting lost in countless possibilities.

Figure 11: Three scenarios model Source: authors.

HOW IT WORKS (AS PART OF SCENARIO BUILDING):



Instead of trying to map every conceivable future, scenario projects often aim to create a few archetypal stories that capture fundamentally different directions the future might take. Common sets include:

BASELINE + EXTREMES:

A "business-as-usual" or continuation-of-current-trends scenario, contrasted with more optimistic/desirable and pessimistic/challenging alternatives.

2X2 MATRIX OUTCOMES:

The four distinct scenarios generated by plotting two critical uncertainties against each other (as detailed in the 2x2 matrix method).

ARCHETYPAL NARRATIVES:

Using established frameworks like Dator's Four Futures (Growth, Collapse, Discipline, Transformation) to structure the scenarios.

The key is that each scenario in the set should be plausible, internally consistent, and significantly different from the others to effectively challenge thinking and test strategies.

ADAPTING FOR YOUTH WORK:

- **Keep it manageable: Especially when working with youth or in limited timeframes, focusing on 3-4 scenarios makes the process less overwhelming and easier to grasp.**

- **Emphasise contrast: Ensure the scenarios developed feel genuinely different to spark richer discussion about choices and consequences.**

- **Use relatable themes: Base the scenarios on themes directly relevant to young people (e.g., 3 scenarios for the future of school, 3 scenarios for local transport).**

WHEN & WHY USEFUL FOR YOUTH WORK:

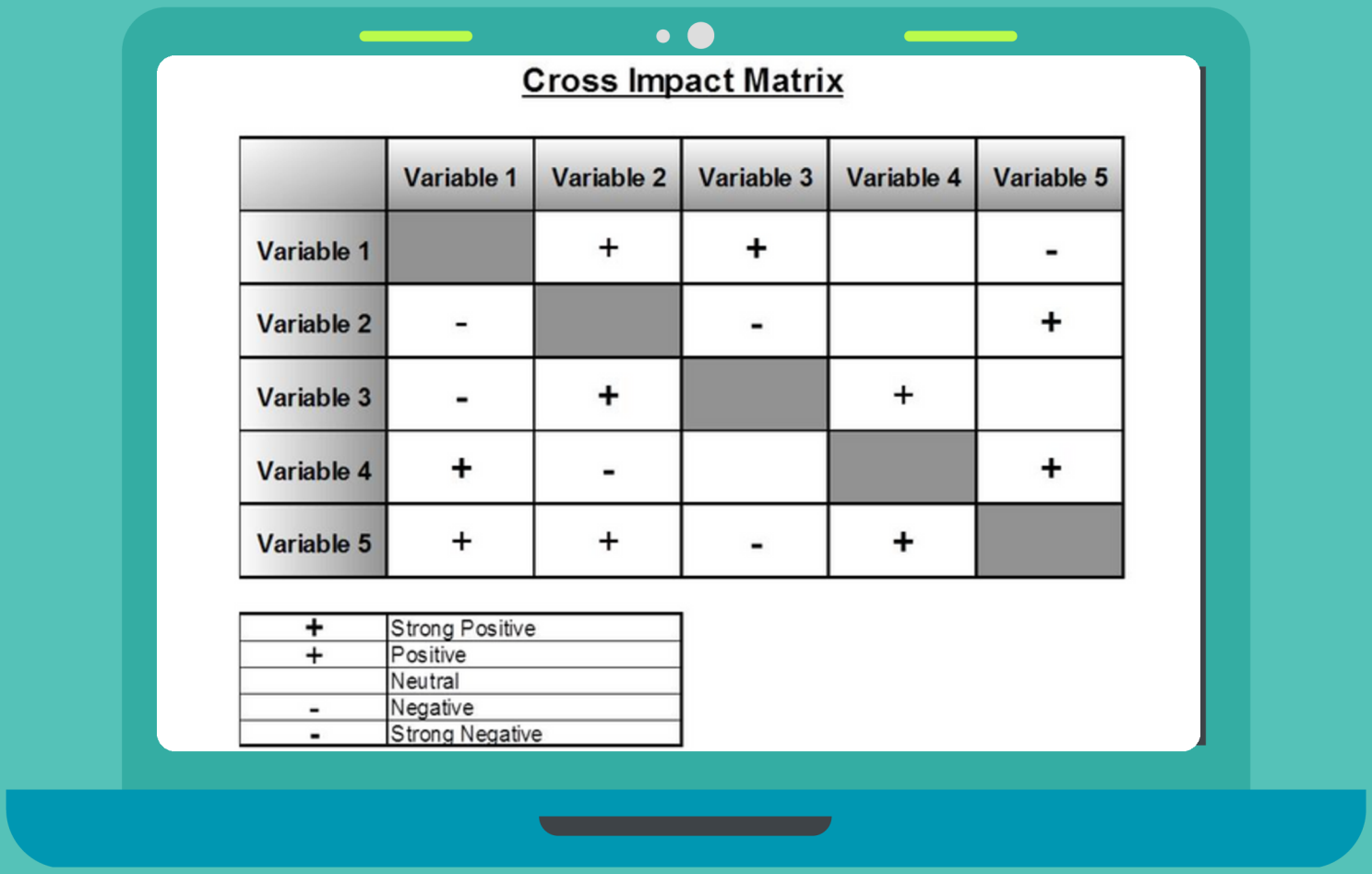
- Clarity & communication: A small set of distinct scenarios is easier to understand, discuss, and communicate than a vast array of possibilities.

- Strategic thinking: Allows groups to effectively test their ideas or plans against a range of different future contexts ("Will our project still work in Scenario A? What about Scenario B?").

- Decision making: Helps highlight key uncertainties and potential trade-offs by comparing outcomes across different scenarios.
- Focus: Prevents the foresight exercise from becoming too broad or abstract.

CROSS-IMPACT ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING INTERCONNECTIONS

Cross-Impact Analysis (CIA) is a method used to explore and evaluate how different trends, events, or variables influence each other within a system. It moves beyond looking at factors in isolation and focuses on their interdependencies - how a change in one area might trigger or inhibit change in another.



Cross Impact Matrix

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3	Variable 4	Variable 5
Variable 1		+	+		-
Variable 2	-		-		+
Variable 3	-	+		+	
Variable 4	+	-			+
Variable 5	+	+	-	+	

+	Strong Positive
+	Positive
	Neutral
-	Negative
-	Strong Negative

Figure 12: Cross-impact matrix Source: Discover Your Solutions LLC. https://discoveryoursolutions.com/toolkit/cross_impact_matrix.html

HOW IT WORKS:

1 **Identify key variables:**
Select a set of important trends, events, or factors relevant to the topic (e.g., for youth well-being: social media use, access to green spaces, school stress, availability of mental health services). Keep the list manageable (e.g., 5-10 factors)

2 **Create a matrix:**
Set up a grid where the selected variables are listed across both the top row and the left-most column.

3 **Assess interactions:**
For each cell in the matrix, consider how the variable in the row might impact the variable in the column. Ask: "If [row variable] increases/occurs, does it make [column variable] more likely, less likely, or have no significant effect?" This assessment can be qualitative (e.g., using symbols like ++, +, 0, -, --) or quantitative (estimating probabilities, though this is more complex).

4 **Analyse the matrix:**
Look for patterns in the completed matrix.

- Which variables have the most outgoing arrows/strong positive impacts (key drivers)?
- Which variables have the most incoming arrows/are heavily influenced by others (key outcomes/indicators)?
- Are there feedback loops (A influences B, and B influences A)?
- Are there unexpected connections?

5 **Interpret & use insights:**
Discuss the findings. How does this understanding of interconnections change perspectives on the issue? Use it to refine scenarios (making them more consistent) or identify strategic leverage points (influencing a key driver might have widespread effects).

ADAPTING FOR YOUTH WORK:

- Keep it qualitative & visual: Focus on discussing the direction and nature of influence (+/-) rather than complex probabilities. Use sticky notes on a large grid for a hands-on approach.
- Limit variables: Work with a small number of clearly defined variables (5-7 is often manageable for a group discussion).
- Focus on relevance: Choose variables directly related to young people's experiences and concerns.
- Use as a discussion starter: The process of filling the matrix is often as valuable as the final output, sparking rich discussion about cause and effect.

WHEN & WHY USEFUL FOR YOUTH WORK:

- Systems thinking: Helps young people understand that issues are interconnected and rarely have simple, isolated causes or solutions.
- Scenario refinement: Can test the internal consistency of scenarios - do the trends within a scenario logically support each other?
- Identifying leverage points: Highlights which factors might be most influential, suggesting where efforts for change could be most effective.
- Deeper understanding: Moves beyond surface-level discussion to explore underlying dynamics.

TO WRAP THINGS UP...

Mastering every foresight method isn't necessary. The goal is to build a versatile toolkit and understand when to deploy different approaches. By incorporating methods like Delphi, wild cards & weak signals, horizon scanning, focused scenario sets, and cross-impact analysis alongside core techniques, you can create richer, more nuanced, and ultimately more empowering foresight experiences for young people. These tools help move beyond simple prediction towards deeper understanding, creative exploration, and proactive engagement with the futures we are all co-creating.



2.11 CROSS-METHODOLOGY INSIGHTS

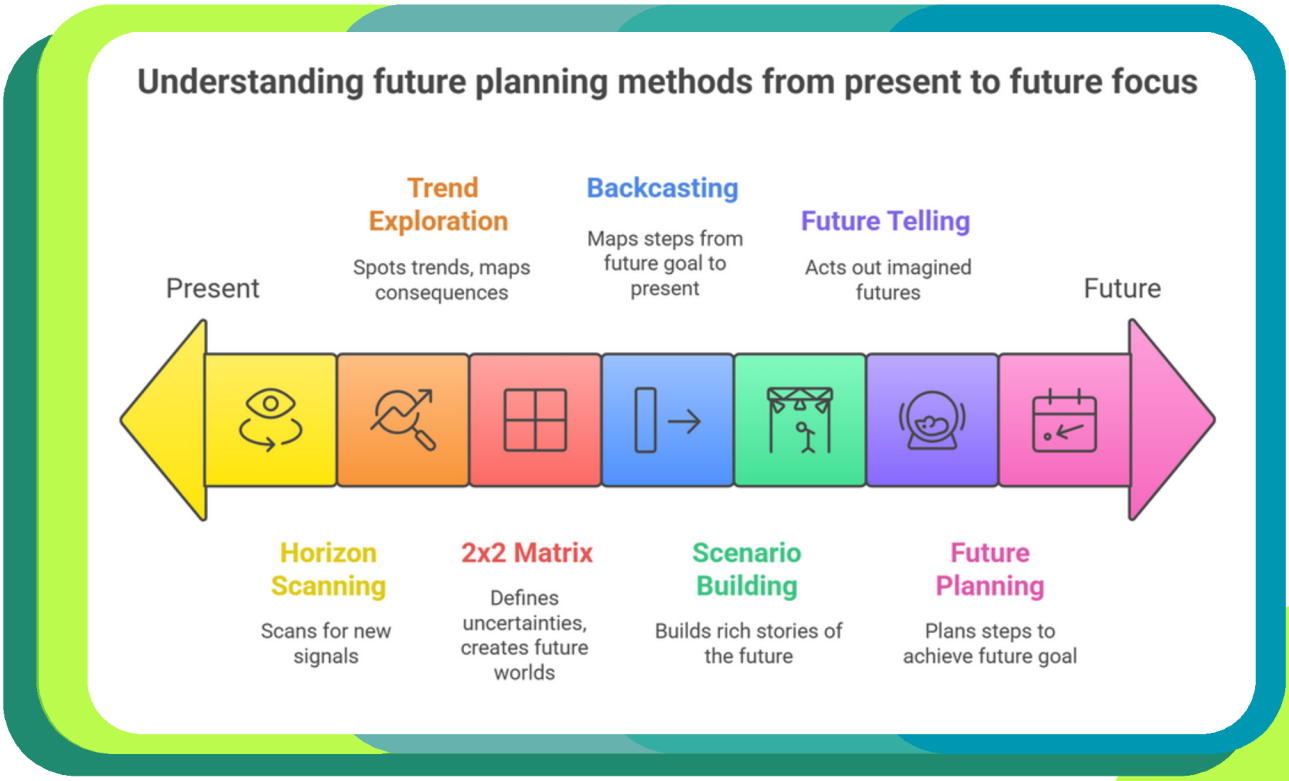
In foresight, there's no one-size-fits-all tool. Just like in youth work, different situations call for different approaches. Some methods help us spot early changes, others help us imagine bold futures, and some guide us to act today with tomorrow in mind.

By learning when to use which method and how to combine them, youth workers can develop richer, more adaptable strategies. Whether you're running a one-hour workshop or designing a long-term program, knowing your tools is key.

METHOD	BEST FOR	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS
TREND EXPLORATION	Understanding change over time	Builds awareness of forces shaping youth lives	Can be overwhelming without focus or synthesis
FUTURE TELLING	Making futures feel real and emotionally relatable	Builds empathy and engagement, fun for youth	Less structured, can lack analytical depth
SCENARIO BUILDING	Exploring multiple possible futures	Encourages imagination and systems thinking	Time-consuming; may need facilitation skills
BACKCASTING	Planning backwards from a desired future	Great for goal-setting and roadmapping	Requires a clear, shared vision to start
FUTURE WHEELS	Mapping consequences of change	Helps understand the ripple effects of one trend or event	Can become complex quickly; needs synthesis
HORIZON SCANNING	Developing actionable strategies	Focused on practical steps; easy to use with youth	May miss deeper structural or long-term shift
2X2 MATRIX	Structuring uncertainty and strategy	Sharpens strategic thinking and decision-making	May oversimplify complex futures into two dimensions

COMBINING METHODS FOR STRONGER FORESIGHT

Think of foresight like building a house. If you only use a hammer, you won't get very far. You will need a whole toolkit.



Pro tip: You don't have to do it all at once. Use short "method sprints" across multiple sessions.



PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN YOUTH WORK AND EDUCATION

Here you can find a few examples of how you might use different combinations of methods with young people and teams:



1 YOUTH-LED FUTURE LABS (Ideal for youth councils & schools)

Goal: Explore the future of local education and design action plans.

Methods:
horizon Scanning → trend exploration → scenario building → backcasting

Flow:

- Youth scan for change in learning (e.g., AI tutors, remote schools).
- Explore trends like "gamification of learning" or "mental health-first schools".
- Create 2-3 future school scenarios.
- Choose their preferred future and plan backwards to make it real

2 THEATRE OF TOMORROW (great for youth groups & camps)

Goal: Build empathy and imagination through storytelling.

Methods:
Scenario building → future telling

Flow:

- Youth create future worlds (e.g., post-climate action cities).
- Each group picks a character and acts out a day in their life.
- Others reflect on what felt real, surprising, or hopeful.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN YOUTH WORK AND EDUCATION

Here you can find a few examples of how you might use different combinations of methods with young people and teams:



3 STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Goal:
Design programs for the next 5-10 years.

Methods:
trend exploration → futures eheel → 2x2 matrix → future planning

Flow:

- Identify major forces shaping youth work (e.g., tech, funding, well-being).
- Use the futures wheel to explore consequences.
- Build a 2x2 matrix to explore strategy in different futures.
- Develop plans that are flexible across all four scenarios

4 MICRO-FORESIGHT SESSIONS (quick staff or youth workshops)

Goal:
Foster futures thinking in short formats

Methods:
Pick 1-2 tools like trend Cards + backcasting or horizon Scan + future Telling

Flow:

- Spend 30-60 minutes exploring just one future challenge.
- End with a short action or insight

WHY CROSS-METHODOLOGY MATTERS IN YOUTH WORK?

Combining foresight methods offers youth workers:

Flexibility
adapt to the group, time, and topic.

Depth
go from data to imagination to action.

Empowerment
youth become creators, not just recipients, of the future.

Engagement
different tools connect with different learning styles.

It transforms foresight into something participatory, strategic, and hopeful.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH WORKER

1 WHAT TYPE OF FUTURES WORK BEST SUITS MY YOUTH GROUP'S ENERGY AND INTERESTS?

2 WHERE DO I NEED STRUCTURE (PLANNING) VS. CREATIVITY (IMAGINATION)?

3 HOW COULD I EXPERIMENT WITH A NEW METHOD COMBO NEXT TERM?



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3 WORKSHOPS

The final section of this guide focuses on creative workshops - hands-on activities that bring foresight methods into real youth work practice. Designed by a team of youth workers from across Europe, these workshops support young people in exploring possible futures while strengthening skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and creativity.

Each activity is adaptable to different group sizes, experience levels, and contexts. Whether you're working in a classroom, a community centre, or a non-formal setting, these tools can be tailored to meet the needs of your group and the goals of your session.

The following pages provide a selection of ready-to-use workshops that transform theory into practice and support meaningful, engaging work with young people.

WORKSHOP NO. 1: TREND MAPPING/TREND EXPLORATION

Overview:

This workshop introduces young people to trend exploration: the art of spotting early signs of change and mapping how different trends might interact to shape their future world. Participants will work collaboratively to identify emerging trends, visualise connections, and reflect on how these forces could impact youth and communities

Goals:

- Build awareness of social, technological, environmental, economic, and political trends.
- Teach participants how to identify "signals of change".
- Foster critical thinking about how trends interact and evolve.
- Create a trend map connecting key forces shaping the future for youth.

Duration:

90 minutes (can be shortened to 60 minutes with adjustments)

Materials needed:

- Pre-prepared trend cards (or blank cards if youth are generating trends)
- Blank trend mapping sheets or flip chart paper
- Colored markers and pens
- Sticky notes
- Tape or magnets (if using whiteboards)
- Example trend maps (optional for inspiration)

Extra explanation:

- What are "trends"?
- Trends are patterns of change emerging over time, often built from many smaller signals (new behaviours, innovations, events).
- What are "signals"?
- A signal is a small clue that something new is happening - like a new youth app, a viral protest movement, or a shift in language or fashion.

Theme: The future of education

Signals:
Rise of AI tutors, TikTok study hacks, hybrid online-offline learning models.

Trends:
"gamification of learning", "mental health prioritisation", "micro-credentials replacing degrees".

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	ACTIVITY (WHAT TO DO)	DESCRIPTION (HOW TO DO IT)
0-10 MIN	Welcome & Overview	Explain workshop goals & introduce the concepts of trends and signals.
10-20 MIN	Examples of Trends & Signals	Share 2-3 current examples and ask for participants' observations.
20-30 MIN	Group Brainstorm: Spotting Signals	In small groups, brainstorm emerging signals or changes they notice around them.
30-50 MIN	Trend Building	Groups turn related signals into larger trend statements.
50-70 MIN	Mapping Trends	Groups map their trends visually: How are they connected? What influences what?
70-80 MIN	Group Gallery Walk	Groups share their trend maps with each other, explaining key insights.
80-90 MIN	Reflection & Closing Discussion	Discuss: What trends matter most to youth today? What surprises emerged?

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- **Keep examples relatable:** use youth-centric examples like sports, sustainability activism, mental health trends, etc.
- **Encourage scanning across categories:** trends aren't just tech! Include culture, environment, society, and politics.
- **Push for connections**: ask, "How might this trend amplify or block another?"



- **Embrace uncertainty:** trends are possibilities, not predictions.
- **Use colour coding:** suggest participants use different colours for trend categories (e.g., social = blue, tech = green).
- **Adapt on the fly**: if energy dips, move to a faster brainstorm or create "mini maps" instead of full ones.

WORKSHOP NO. 2: FUTURE TELLING

Overview:

This workshop introduces participants to Future Telling, a creative foresight method where they perform a scene from a possible future. Rather than just talking about change, youth step into future worlds, exploring challenges, opportunities, and emotions through storytelling and role-play.

Materials needed:

- Blank paper or fortune-telling story templates
- Markers, pens
- Basic props - get creative with what you already have on hand (optional: scarves, hats, signs, etc.)
- Space for small group performances
- Timer or stopwatch
- Recording device (optional, if filming performances)

Extra explanation:

- What is "Future Telling"?
- Future Telling is acting out a story that happens in the future. It brings abstract ideas, such as new technologies, social changes, or environmental shifts, to life through theatre and storytelling.
- Why act it out?
- Research shows people better understand new ideas when they can see and feel them, not just hear about them. Future Telling builds emotional connections with future possibilities.

Goals:

- Build imagination, empathy, and future thinking skills.
- Help youth embody and experience possible future scenarios.
- Stimulate reflection on actions today that shape tomorrow.
- Develop storytelling and collaboration skills.

Duration:

- 90 minutes (can be expanded to 2 hours for deeper exploration)

Example scenario:

- Theme: The future of communication
- Scenario: In 2040, people communicate using thought-to-text devices. Privacy debates are everywhere.
- Characters: A teen activist, a school principal, a tech company lawyer, a nervous parent.
- (Note: Facilitators can create their own scenario and characters based on local issues or current topics relating to youth, like climate action, youth employment, or mental health.)

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	ACTIVITY (WHAT TO DO)	DESCRIPTION (HOW TO DO IT)
0-10 MIN	Welcome & Overview	Explain goals and introduce the idea of Future Telling.
10-20 MIN	Quick Warm-Up	Fun improv game to loosen up (e.g., "one-word story" or "frozen pictures"). **One-Word story:** Participants sit or stand in a circle and collaboratively create a story by adding one word at a time, building unpredictably as it goes. **Frozen pictures:** Small groups quickly pose like statues to create a "frozen picture" that represents a scene, idea, or emotion - without speaking.
20-30 MIN	Brainstorm Future Scenarios	In small groups, pick a theme (e.g., Future of cities, Education, Identity) and imagine life 15-20 years ahead.
30-45 MIN	Create characters & short story	Groups create 2-4 characters and a short story about a situation in their future world.
45-65 MIN	Rehearse the scene	Groups plan a quick dialogue and decide on simple props if needed.
65-80 MIN	Performances	Each group presents their short Future Telling scene (approximately 5 minutes each)
80-90 MIN	Reflection & discussion	What future did you see? What surprised you? What did it feel like to "live" in that future?

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- **Keep it playful:** encourage humour, drama, and exaggeration. It brings energy and imagination alive!
- **Focus on feelings and experiences:** the goal isn't "perfect acting" - it's about exploring what the future could feel like.
- **Allow creative freedom:** some groups might create sci-fi futures; others might keep it very realistic. Both are great!
- **Use simple prompts:** "What is a normal day like for your character?", "What problem do they face?
- **Support shy participants:** offer roles like narrator or "set designer", since some young people prefer to stay behind the scenes.
- **Highlight diversity:** encourage imagining inclusive, accessible, and global futures.



WORKSHOP NO. 3: THE FUTURE LAB

Overview:

This workshop encourages participants to explore different possible futures shaped by social, environmental, and technological change. By identifying emerging trends and building creative scenarios, young people learn how today's choices shape tomorrow's world.

Materials needed: In person

- Large paper/flip charts for group work and scenario mapping
- Markers and pens for brainstorming and drawing
- Sticky notes for idea clustering and grouping trends
- Printed scenario templates (optional)

Materials needed: Online Workshop

- Miro/Jamboard for real-time group collaboration and scenario creation
- Google Slides or PowerPoint for group presentations (digital slides to present scenarios and action plans)

Goals: At the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Understand scenario building and its types: exploratory, normative, and disruptive.
- Identify drivers of change (key factors shaping the future).
- Develop different future scenarios and reflect on their potential impact.

Duration:

- Approx. 120 minutes

Scenario introduction:

Imagine it's the year 2040. Youth-led platforms have transformed democracy. Young people can vote online, propose laws, and influence national policies. Now ask: "What events or trends from today could have led to this future?"

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- **Encourage creativity and open-mindedness.**
- **Use guiding questions to spark discussion, like "What if...?"**
- **Keep the workshop interactive with group work and presentations**

Signs of new :

- Use emerging trends relevant to the topics you want the youth to explore. These trends will act as clues to help participants spot early indicators of the future trends they'll be planning for. Here are some examples you can either use directly or adapt to your workshop theme:
- "Young people are increasingly being elected to local and national offices, influencing policy on climate and education."
- Digital Democracy - "Youth-led platforms are being created for online voting, enabling young people to propose and vote on laws."
- "Youth-led climate movements are pushing for global policy change, making sustainability a top priority for governments."
- "Youth activists are using social media to organise global protests, challenging traditional political systems."

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
0-10 MIN	Intro & icebreaker	The facilitator welcomes participants. Ask: "What would happen if youth were in charge of the world?" Encourage fun and imagination.
10-30 MIN	Step 1 - Identify drivers of change	Facilitator introduces the concept of drivers of change (forces that influence the future - e.g. climate, tech, social justice). Small groups brainstorm trends and use sticky notes or online tools to cluster similar ideas.
30-50 MIN	Step 2 - Scenario creation	Groups develop 3 different scenarios based on the same starting point. Encourage them to think about a best-case scenario, a worst-case scenario, and a wild card/disruptive scenario (i.e., something unexpected)
50-75 MIN	Step 3 - Scenario mapping	Teams create visual maps of their scenarios, timelines, flowcharts, drawings - showing key events or turning points.
75-90 MIN	Step 4 - Group presentations	Each group presents their 3 scenarios. Facilitator encourages focus on causes, consequences, and surprises.
90-105 MIN	Step 5 - Reflection & discussion	Whole group discussion: "What did we learn? What would we change in today's world to influence the future?"
105-120 MIN	Wrap-Up	Closing reflection: "What is one action we can take today to move towards the future we want?"

WORKSHOP NO. 4: SHAPING TOMORROW

Overview:

This workshop introduces young participants to the concept of future planning - the process of turning future visions into action. After exploring different scenarios, participants will choose a preferred future and use tools like backcasting and action planning to design concrete steps they can take today to move toward that future. The workshop encourages creativity, teamwork, and realistic goal-setting.

Materials needed: In person

- Printed future scenarios (you can use the example provided or create your own future scenario related to youth and democracy)
- Large paper and markers for group work and action pathway mapping
- Sticky notes for idea brainstorming
- Flip charts or large poster sheets for presenting future planning roadmaps

Materials needed: Online Workshop

- Miro or Jamboard (to collaborate on future scenarios and action mapping)
- Google Slides (for group presentations)
- Breakout rooms for small group discussions and planning

Goals: At the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Understand what future planning is and how it differs from forecasting.
- Learn how to use backcasting and action pathway tools.
- Create a visual action roadmap from a preferred future to the present.
- Reflect on their role in shaping the future.

Duration:

- Approx. 120 minutes

Scenario introduction:

It’s 2040. Youth across the globe have a central role in shaping policies, from education to climate action, thanks to youth-led platforms. Digital democracy is the norm, allowing young people to vote on legislation and influence government decisions. You will look back on today and identify the "signs of new" that could have led to this transformation.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Encourage open discussion: Don’t worry about having all the answers. Guide the group and let them discover themselves.
- Allow for creative thinking: Future planning is about possibility. Let young people imagine bold futures and break down how to achieve them.
- Engage with the action steps: It's not just about "what the future could be" - it’s about how we can shape it starting today.
- If the group gets stuck: Ask simple, clarifying questions like:
- “What changes are happening today that we need to be aware of?”
- “What can we do right now to start building the future we want?”
- “Who can we collaborate with to make this happen?”

Signs of new :

Use emerging trends relevant to the topics you want the youth to explore. These trends will act as clues to help participants spot early indicators of the future trends they’ll be planning for. Here are some examples you can either use directly or adapt to your workshop theme:

- "Youth-led climate movements are influencing government policy."
- "The rise of AI-driven education platforms in schools."
- "Social media campaigns increasingly shape national policy on mental health."
- "Youth participation in digital voting is growing in local governments".

WORKSHOP PLAN - STEP BY STEP

TIME	ACTIVITY (WHAT TO DO)	DESCRIPTION (HOW TO DO IT)
0-15 MIN	Intro & icebreaker	Welcome participants. Ask: "What does your ideal future look like in 10-20 years?" Introduce the detective role — how they'll work backwards from the future.
15-30 MIN	Step 1 - Clue exploration	Participants read through the provided "signs of new" (headlines or scenarios). Ask: "What stands out to you?" "What might influence this trend in the future?" "Do you see signs of this trend in your community or school?" "Have you or someone you know experienced something similar?"
30-75 MIN	Step 2 - From clues to action	In groups (3-5), participants explore the trends and begin identifying actions. Start by asking: "What changes are already happening today that point to this future?" Then guide them toward action by asking: "What needs to happen in your school, community, or country to make this future real?", "What milestones should we reach by 2025 or 2030?"
75-95 MIN	Step 3 - Group presentations	Groups share their action plans and vision with everyone. Ask: "What is the most important action to take right now?" "Who should be involved in this process?"
95-110 MIN	Step 4 - Reflection & discussion	A big group discussion on the lessons learned. Ask: "What surprised you about the planning process?" "What can we start doing today to support this future?"
110-120 MIN	Wrap-Up	Thank participants. Have each group share one key takeaway. Say: "You've just planned for the future - now go out and act on it!"

WORKSHOP NO. 5 : HOW TO LEAD A BACKCASTING WORKSHOP (DESIGNING FUTURES IN REVERSE)

Overview:

This workshop guides young people through the powerful foresight method of backcasting. Instead of asking "What will happen?" it flips the script: "What future do we want—and how do we build it?" Participants start by imagining a positive, desirable future, and then work backwards to identify the milestones and actions needed to get there.

Target group:

- Young people aged 14-30, especially suited for youth organisations, school groups, youth councils, or thematic workshops (climate, inclusion, education, etc.)

Materials:

- Large paper or flipcharts
- Sticky notes or index cards
- Pens, markers, and tape
- Optional: printed prompts or scenario cards
- Online version: Miro, Jamboard, or Google Slides

Goals:

- Help young people think beyond short-term problem-solving
- Strengthen systems thinking, creativity, and agency
- Support values-driven planning and long-term visioning
- Encourage collaboration and civic imagination

Duration:

- 90-120 minutes (can be extended for deeper projects)



WORKSHOP PLAN - STEP BY STEP

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
0-15 MIN	Welcome and warm-up	Ask: "What's one thing you would change about the world by 2040?" Briefly introduce backcasting as a creative method that starts from the future and works backwards. Emphasise: this is not a prediction, it's a design.
15-30 MIN	Step 1: Vision the future	Participants imagine a desirable future in 2040 around a theme (e.g. inclusive education, a sustainable city, fair job markets). In groups or pairs, they describe it in detail. Ask: "What does this future look like? Who benefits? What values guide it?" Encourage drawing, storytelling, or bullet points.
30-50 MIN	Step 2: Identify key milestones	Starting from the vision, ask: "What had to happen for this future to exist?" Have participants work backwards, identifying 3-5 major breakthroughs, changes, or interventions. Write each on a separate sticky note and begin placing them on a timeline.
50-70 MIN	Step 3: Build the roadmap	Now focus on the pathway from today to the vision. Ask: "What actions, people, or decisions helped these milestones happen?" Add more steps to the timeline, filling in with ideas about policies, campaigns, technologies, alliances, or mindset shifts. Encourage thinking about who is involved and what barriers were overcome.
70-90 MIN	Step 4: Action planning	Ask each group: "What can we start doing now to move toward that future?" Encourage them to identify 2-3 small but strategic actions or first steps they could take. These can be local initiatives, awareness campaigns, partnerships, or changes in everyday behaviour. Invite them to choose one action they feel motivated to pursue or advocate for.

WORKSHOP PLAN - STEP BY STEP

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
90-110 MIN	Step 5: Group sharing and reflection	Each group briefly presents their vision, roadmap, and key actions. Afterwards, hold a whole-group reflection. Suggested questions: • "What did you learn about creating change?" • "Did anything surprise you?" "How does this change how you see the future?" Encourage participants to notice patterns across visions and paths
90-110 MIN	Wrap-up and inspiration	Thank everyone for their work. Ask each group to share one word that captures how they feel after the exercise (e.g. "empowered," "curious," "hopeful"). Remind them: they are future-builders, and what they imagine matters. Optional: Take photos of timelines or create a digital version to revisit in future sessions.



TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- **Stay flexible**. Some groups may need more support in imagining the future, while others will leap into visioning. Adapt based on their energy and confidence.
- **Encourage imagination**. The future is not fixed. Prompt youth to think big, explore values, and step outside current limitations.
- **Support structure.** Use a whiteboard or wall for a large timeline, and give groups visual templates if needed to organise their ideas.
- **Balance idealism with realism.** Acknowledge that not all futures are easy to reach—but that all progress starts with clear intention and collective action.
- **Celebrate ideas**. There is no "right" vision. Affirm each group's creativity and insight.

OPTIONAL VARIATIONS

- Use prompts. If participants need inspiration, offer cards or slides with sample futures (e.g. "A world where every young person votes" or "A school system built for wellbeing").
- Thematic focus. Adapt the workshop to explore specific challenges like climate justice, mental health, or digital rights.
- Ongoing cycle. Revisit the roadmaps after a few months and track progress on the proposed actions

- Ongoing cycle. Revisit the roadmaps after a few months and track progress on the proposed actions

WORKSHOP NO. 6: FUTURES WHEEL

Overview:

This workshop introduces young people to the futures wheel, a creative foresight method that maps out the consequences of change. Starting with a single event, idea, or trend, participants brainstorm outward in layers, uncovering direct, indirect, and longer-term effects. It is a simple, visual way to explore complexity and think through the interconnected nature of societal change.

Target group:

- Young people aged 13–30, youth workers, educators, or participants exploring civic engagement, climate change, digital futures, or innovation

Materials:

- Large paper or flipcharts
- Sticky notes or colored index cards
- Markers or pens in several colours
- Optional: printed prompts, scenarios, or current event articles
- Online: Miro, Jamboard, or Google Slides for digital collaboration

Goals:

- Encourage systems thinking and holistic analysis
- Help youth reflect on the long-term impact of current trends or decisions
- Build awareness of both intended and unintended consequences
- Support collaborative foresight and ethical reflection

Duration:

- 60-90 minutes (can be shortened or extended depending on time and depth)

WORKSHOP PLAN - STEP BY STEP

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
0-10 MIN	Welcome and introduce the concept	Begin by asking: "What's one change happening in the world today that could shape our future?" Briefly introduce the Futures Wheel as a way to explore the consequences of change. Emphasise that the method is not about prediction, but possibility
10-20 MIN	Step 1: Choose a central change	As a group or in smaller teams, choose one event or trend to focus on. Examples: "Youth guaranteed income is introduced," "AI replaces 50% of school tasks," or "Single-use plastics are banned." Write this clearly in the centre of the wheel
20-35 MIN	Step 2: Map first-order impacts	Ask: "What happens immediately as a result of this change?" Participants brainstorm and add these first-level impacts around the central idea. Each one is connected with a line. Encourage a mix of effects: social, personal, economic, cultural. Don't filter ideas too early
35-50 MIN	Step 3: Map second-order impacts	Now ask: "What happens because of the first-order impacts?" These are second-level effects. For each first-order impact, draw lines outward and add related consequences. This step deepens the analysis and invites systems thinking. Encourage the group to think about less obvious or unintended outcomes
50-65 MIN	Step 4 (optional): third-order impacts	If time and energy allow, take one or two second-order impacts further. Ask: "What could happen next?" This level often uncovers emotional, cultural, or long-term societal shifts
65-80 MIN	Step 5: Analyse and reflect	Step back and look at the full wheel. Ask: • "What surprised you?" • "Which impacts are positive, negative, or uncertain?" • "Which effects might require preparation or intervention?" Encourage colour coding (e.g. green for positive, red for risks) or symbols to visualise emerging patterns.
80-90 MIN	Wrap-up	Have each group or participant share one key insight. Reflect on how visualising consequences changed their view of the issue. Close with a reminder: every change we make today has ripple effects, and young people have the power to shape those ripples.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- **Keep it visual:** Use large paper or shared screens so the ripple effects are easy to see.
- **Encourage diversity of thought:** Welcome all ideas, even if they seem far-fetched. Complexity emerges through discussion.
- **Focus on systems:** Prompt participants to think beyond the obvious. Ask: "Who else is affected? What chain reactions might follow?"
- **Balance depth and clarity:** If groups go too broad, help them focus. If they stay too narrow, challenge them to go deeper.

OPTIONAL VARIATIONS

- **Thematic wheels:** Assign different topics to different groups (e.g. climate policy, digital technology, social movements)
- **Compare and contrast.** Have two groups explore different starting points and then compare their futures.
- **Follow-up actions.** Invite participants to select one impact and brainstorm how to prepare for or influence it positively.

WORKSHOP NO. 7: DETECTIVES OF THE FUTURE (YOUTH + DEMOCRACY EDITION)

Overview:

This engaging, hands-on activity invites young people to step into the role of “future detectives” as they explore how youth participation and democracy might develop in the years ahead. Using real headlines as "signs of new", they analyse current events as clues to imagine future trends - and reflect on how they can take action today.

Target group:

- Young people (ages 15-30), youth workers, teachers, or anyone curious about youth + democracy

Materials:

- **In-person:** 20-30 printed headlines, paper, pens, markers, sticky notes, tables/chairs
- **Online:** Miro, Jamboard or Google Slides; headlines uploaded in advance; breakout rooms

Goals:

- Encourage critical thinking about change, practise trend-spotting and scenario building, and highlight the impact of youth voices in shaping democracy.

Duration:

- 2 hours (but you can make it shorter or longer)

Scenario introduction:

The year is 2040. A youth-led democratic platform has taken root across Europe, empowering young people to vote, propose laws, and fund local initiatives. Participants are invited to look back at today and search for clues that might have led to this change.

(You can also create your own scenario.)

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Don’t worry about doing it perfectly - just guide the group step by step.
- Let participants lead the discovery - there are no right or wrong answers.
- - Encourage fun, imagination, and curiosity.
- If a group gets stuck, ask simple questions like:
- "What’s changing in this headline?"
- "Why is this happening now?"
- "How could this affect young people?"

Signs of new :

These are short, real-world headlines or news snippets that point to emerging changes in society. They act as clues to spark curiosity and help participants imagine what the future might look like.
For example, a headline such as "TikTok stars launch a campaign to get youth voting" or "More teens joining local councils in Germany" can open up discussion about how young people’s roles in civic life are evolving.

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
0-15 MIN	Intro & icebreaker	Welcome participants. Ask: "If youth ran the country, what would change first?" Explain their detective role.
15-30 MIN	Step 1 - Clue reading	Participants choose 2-3 headlines that surprise them. Ask: "What stands out or feels important?"
30-50 MIN	Step 2 - Talk in groups	In groups (3-5), they discuss and find patterns. Ask: "Do we see common themes?"
50-75 MIN	Step 3 - Group the values	Groups cluster headlines into 2-3 trends. Give creative names (e.g. "TikTok Politics")
75-95 MIN	Step 4 - Share with everyone	Groups present their trends and reflect on their meaning for democracy. Ask: "What could this mean for youth involvement?"
95-110 MIN	Step 5 - Reflection	Big group discussion. Ask: "What surprised you? What can we do now to support youth participation?"
110-120 MIN	Wrap-up	Thank participants. Share one takeaway per group. Say: "You're now future detectives. Keep spotting clues!"

WORKSHOP NO. 8:
2X2 MATRIX

Overview:

A dynamic and experiential activity where young people explore and design alternative futures in a structured and creative way. They create four distinct scenarios based on two critical uncertainties - the key drivers that are most likely to shape the future but whose outcomes are unpredictable.

Target group:

- Young people (ages 15-30), youth workers, teachers, activists, or anyone curious about the future, youth + democracy.

Materials:

- **In-person:** A4 paper (white and colourful), pens, markers, paper tape (or rope)
- **Online:** Miro or Google Slides; matrix template prepared in advance

Goals:

- Enhance the ability to imagine multiple alternative futures, encourage scenario thinking and building, explore different ways the future might unfold, and provide a chance of reflecting on the current situation in a new light by finding new possibilities

Duration:

- 2 hours (but you can make it shorter or longer)

Definitions:

- **Drivers of Change** are key forces or trends that are shaping the future, influencing how systems evolve, shape or transform over time.
- **Scenarios** are not predictions but structured stories about different possible futures, designed to help (young) people explore uncertainty, imagine change, and make better decisions today.

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
0-10 MIN	Intro & settings	Welcome participants. Introduce goals, settings, and the timeframe of the workshop.
10-25 MIN	Step 1 - Define the question	Define together with the whole group the question you want to explore together.
25-40 MIN	Step 2 - Define the key drivers	Brainstorm the key drivers that will influence and shape the future regarding the chosen topic. Then choose the two most crucial ones that are independent of each other. Both drivers should be highly impactful and highly uncertain.
40-70 MIN	Step 3 - Form the matrix & create the 4 scenarios	Arrange the Matrix on the floor using rope or paper tape. Each line of the matrix represents one of the key drivers. Then ask the participants to imagine each line as a spectrum of two extremes and invite them to define the ends. Once done, write on paper the extremes and position at the ends of the lines. Divide participants in 4 small groups and position one group in each quadrant. Give participants the task to imagine and describe shortly the main message of this scenario.
70-90 MIN	Step 4 - Present the scenarios	Once scenarios are ready, let the participants name them so that the title clearly shows the specific and unique characteristics of this scenario. Invite the groups to present the scenarios (you can also ask them to play/perform the scenarios).

WORKSHOP PLAN

TIME	WHAT TO DO	HOW TO DO IT
90-110 MIN	Step 5 - Debrief	In plenary, discuss the experience. Ask the participants: 1. How do you feel about each scenario? 2. What are the most impressive and surprising characteristics you found out? 3. Which scenarios do you find positive and which negative? 4. What strategies and actions can we do now to help achieve or avoid these scenarios?
110-120 MIN	Wrap-up & closure	Ask participants with one word what they take with them from the workshop. Remind them that: * future is not fixed, and there are multifutures, * our current actions shape our futures. Thank the participants.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Be playful and encourage curiosity and imagination.
- Keep the Matrix simple and visual.
- Ensure everyone's participation.
- Encourage storytelling.
- Find the balance of enjoyment and in-depth discussions.
- Do not forget to link the future to the present and inspire action

CONCLUSION

We are glad you have reached the end of our Guidebook. We hope that you will use it in your work with young people (or even non-youth) or that you managed to learn something new. Our goal was to point out the importance of foresight, its theoretical pitfalls, its use in a practical sphere, and, last but not least, its use in youth work. We believe that we have fulfilled the principles we were guided by and set in the introduction, and have created more than decent material that can be followed up with other theoretical or practical outputs.

As frequently stated, Foresight is not merely a vague concept used to predict the future, like peering into a crystal ball. In reality, it is a structured set of methods and tools that can be applied across many areas, including political strategy, business planning, academic research, military preparation and, crucially, youth work. Its relevance is especially clear in today's world, shaped by uncertainty, global crises and the long-term challenges that younger generations are already beginning to face.

It is in the interest of both society and the wider world to equip the next generation with the skills needed to navigate possible futures. This involves helping young people learn how to think logically about where current trends, drivers and signals might lead. By encouraging this kind of thinking, we can be better prepared for the complex challenges that may arise.

Being prepared is important. Having a plan, and ideally several backup plans, can help us get through tough times. As the saying goes, "fortune favours the prepared."



**REMEMBER,
IT'S ESSENTIAL
TO BE PREPARED!**



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