

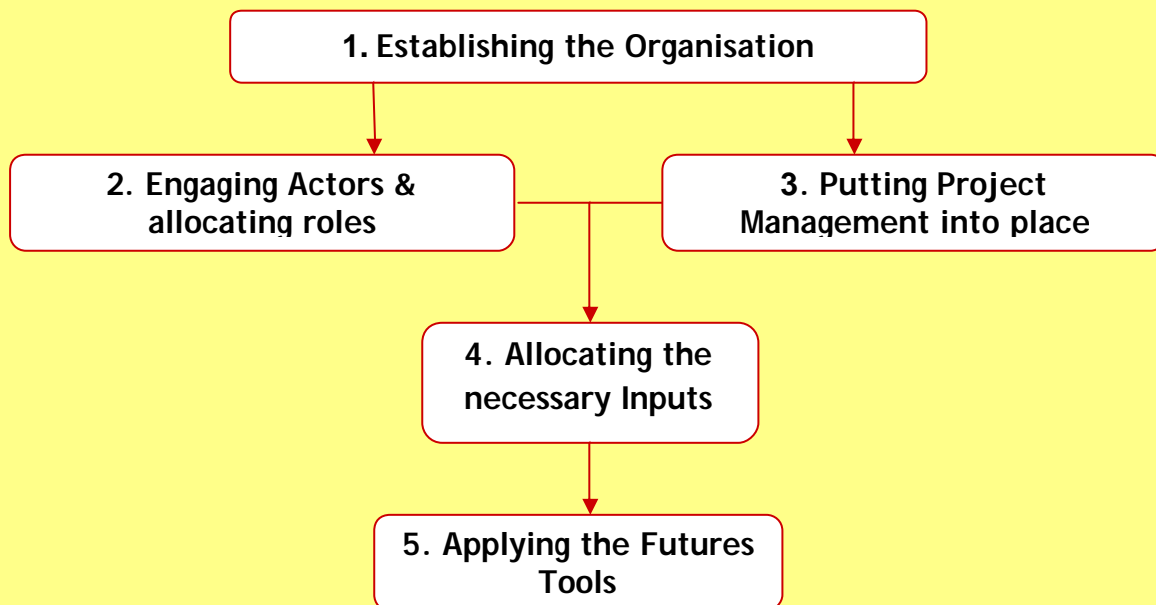
3 LAUNCHING A FUTURES EXERCISE

In this section you will:

- **Learn** about the main steps required in order to launch a futures exercise
- **Understand** the impact on organisation, engagement and resource requirements that different types of futures exercise may have
- **Benefit** from information regarding case studies of actual futures exercises

Once careful thought has been given to the preparation for the futures exercise and the questions suggested in the check list in Section 2 answered satisfactorily, the futures exercise can be launched. Even here however there will be questions and options that need to be considered.

Futures activities are extensive undertakings that require monitoring and organisation to make sure that the objectives of the exercise are achieved. Typically, a steering committee, a dedicated project management team, and consultative groups of stakeholders and experts will need to be engaged and resources allocated. The basic organisation and structure for launching a futures exercise will typically take the following stepped form:



3.1 Establishing the Organisation

In organising a Futures exercises **three chief aspects** must be considered at the outset:

- **Formal structure**
- **Decision processes**
- **Resources**

Every one of these aspects has a variety of activities, varying in importance and depending on the type of exercise planned. For example, futures exercise may be tightly or loosely managed (depending on the scope of the exercise and the competence of the leaders of the exercise) or could be a coordination of activities that are already underway within the organisation or amongst the stakeholders concerned.

As a consequence, identifying the stakeholders and their roles is a key early step and was referred to in Section 2 of the Toolkit and is further referred to in Section 3.2.

A fully developed flexible and responsive organisation structure should be created and adopted within which reasoned consensus can be secured - regarding the scope, organisation and structure of the futures exercise.

The organisation blueprint can cover

- **Formal structure**
- **Management tasks and responsibilities**
- **Milestones & Project phases**
- **Decision making processes**

The following table summarises the variations and options that may appear in the organisation of a futures exercise.

	Tightly centrally managed autonomous project	Loosely centrally managed autonomous project	Coordination of embedded activities
Formal Structure¹			
Identify stakeholders	Essential	Essential	Essential
Appoint a steering committee	Essential	Necessary	Not essential
Set up a management team	Essential	Essential	One individual or more may be sufficient
Recruit a champion	Essential	Useful	No real need
Recruit expertise ²	Essential	Useful	No
Decision Process³			
Define the management style	Essential	Useful	Non-essential
Prepare a brief	Key	Coordination of group plans	Non-essential
Assign jobs to each group	Essential	No	Essential
Resource Procurement			
Identify a sponsor	Essential	Essential	Useful
Obtain resources	Essential	Essential	Essential
Identify existing inputs	Essential	Useful	Useful

¹ All Futures projects require a steering committee and management team instituted as an early step.

² Activities can also employ "expert" groups or panels focussing on particular issues. The mechanics of setting up these groups needs careful consideration since their composition will impact on the whole exercise.

³ The decision making process – certainly if the project is managed centrally – requires definition e.g. decisions made by the project manager or the steering committee so that the terms of conduct can be clearly set out and adhered to etc. Responsibilities and tasks can then be allotted to the various groups appointed.

Tasks commonly associated with a Futures exercise for which resources need to be identified and responsibilities allocated are detailed below:

Typical Futures Tasks	
Nomination of group members	Implementing Futures tools and methods, e.g. scenarios
Managing the process	Organisation of specific issue conferences
Organisation of public debate on specific issues	Preparing synthesis papers and reports
Preparation of specific issue reports	Organisation of expert hearings
Identification of existing literature	Preparation of concluding report

3.2 Stakeholders, Actors & their Tasks

The identities, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders or 'actors' require early and precise definition. Such roles may include being on the steering committee, in the executive project management team, as stakeholders of user/target groups, or as sponsors of the futures exercise.

Alternatively actors can function as promoters, champions, political support, experts, process advisors or sit on a monitoring group.

Stakeholders and actors may themselves play an active role in the materials and implementation of futures tools. In these roles they will usually work alongside expert resources that have been identified in order to implement the exercise.

There are various advantages and disadvantages evident in identifying and sourcing expert input depending on the focus - narrow or broad focus - of the scope decided for the futures exercise (see Section 2):

	Broad consultation	Narrow consultation
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Great number of experts involved ▪ Transparent procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick ▪ Relatively inexpensive
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Costly and lengthy procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small group of experts may have specific interests ▪ Danger of dominating opinion makers

In addition the stakeholder or actor's involvement and roles will differ between *autonomous projects* and *embedded Futures* (see Section 3.1 above). In an embedded Futures exercise that is using international resources and inputs, the actors involved will inevitably be linked closely to the project's management and the participating organisation(s) and probably core staff of the institution. Conversely, in autonomous projects wider involvement is more likely, linked to the scale of the exercise.

	<i>Embedded Futures activities</i>	<i>Autonomous projects</i>
Key Actors	Promoters Stakeholders	Promoters Stakeholders Steering Committee Project Team
Actors usually involved	Futures activities coordinator Experts	Champions Experts
Actors involved in large scale projects only	Does not apply	Citizens Politicians Monitoring group Process experts

3.3 Project Management

Classical but flexible project management structures and conventions are crucial to success of the exercise. Since Futures exercises should be flexible and, at times, iterative management and monitoring tools should consist of indicators providing the relevant actors with relevant data.

Setting up a simple PERT table similar to that illustrated below will be invaluable:

PROJECT MAIN MILESTONES	Expected deadline	Target date	Corrective actions		Budget share	Budget actual	Corrective actions	
			What	Who & When			What	Who & When
Engage stakeholders								
Set-up the infrastructure								
Choose focus and methods								
Gather existing inputs								
Produce new knowledge								
Develop a shared vision								
Produce final deliverables								
Disseminate results								
Monitor the activities								
Incorporate the outputs in stakeholders decision processes								

3.4 Allocating the necessary inputs

Providing the necessary inputs for a futures exercise is both a question of resourcing (people; expertise; funding etc) and of information gathering and assimilation. On the question of resources, the issues and questions raised in Section 2 are highly relevant. If the scope of the exercise is balanced by the competency and legitimacy of the leading stakeholders as well as by an effective engagement of key stakeholders and actors... then the allocation of the resources

necessary for delivery of the futures exercise should be assured. However, the exercise may struggle for resources if the key stakeholders have not been engaged effectively or if the scope of the exercise is not balanced by the legitimate role of the key instigators of the exercise.

On the question of specific information gathering and assimilation, it may be useful to regard the information as falling within two categories: gathering of existing information (passive) and production of new material and information (active).

If these resources are limited or expensive, it may also be sensible to take into account the minimum competencies required to commence. You may have to reassess the scope of your exercise if limitations have been identified, as noted in Section 2.

However, it may be necessary to consider accessing external human/network resources that have an affinity or synergy with the main focus or scope of the futures exercise (e.g. Sustainable Development or Information Society networks).

- **Passive sources of information** include any type of information or data regarding the current status of the organisation or region and any data that will allow you to construct a retrospective analysis of the main trends (i.e. economic, social and demographic trends), both quantitative and qualitative.
- **Active sources of information** largely include 'resources' usable during the course of the exercise e.g. experts and networks engaged in the futures exercise.

3.5 Applying the Futures Toolkit

The Futures Toolkit consists, initially, of 5 formal Futures methods with their appropriateness dependent upon the context and scope of the exercise you envisage. Section 5 of the Futures Toolkit provides a detailed presentation of the 5 methods used in Futurreg and will help you in determining the most appropriate for the type of exercise you envisage. The case studies included in Section 9 provide a wide perspective on the preparation and launch of different types of Futures methods used in specific contexts both single and in combination.

You should now:

- **Understand** the main steps required in order to launch a futures exercise
- **Understand** the impact on organisation, engagement and resource requirements that different types of futures exercise may have
- **Be ready to consider** which futures tools to use in your exercise and how to go about selecting the most appropriate tool.