ALL TOMORROW'S POLICIES

PUBLIC SERVICE DESIGN KIT

PUBLIC POLICY LAB

About the Card Deck

This card deck includes:

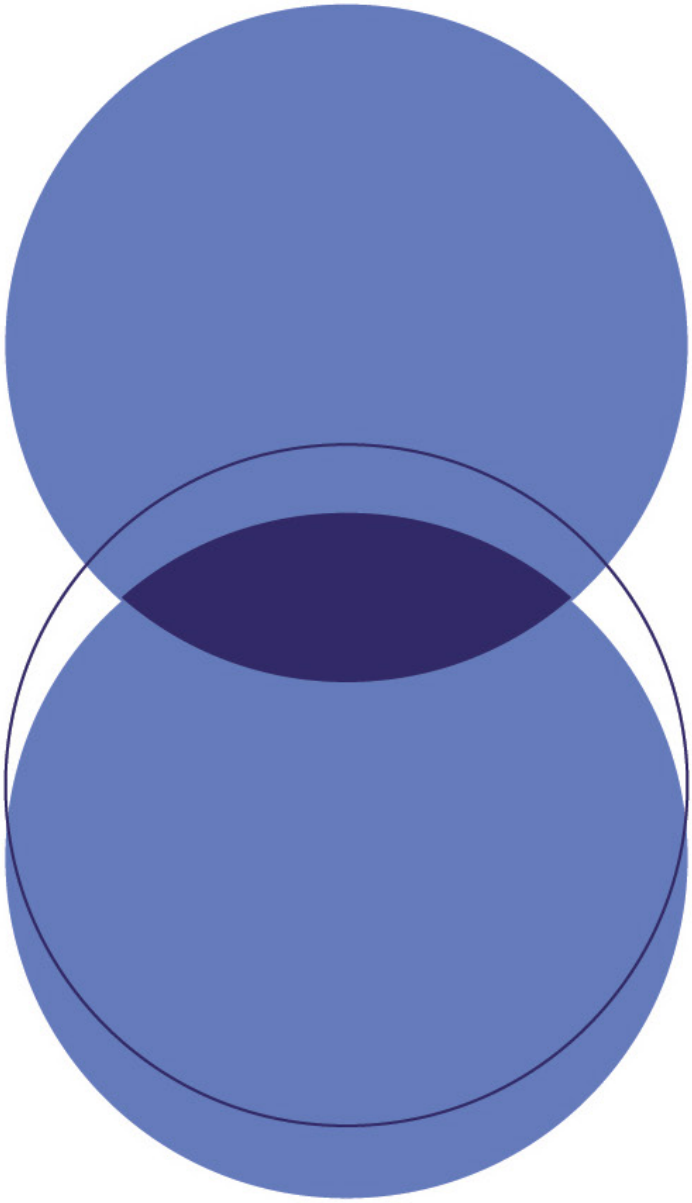
- 5 phase cards showing the steps of a policy innovation project
- 25 present methods cards with design research and policy innovation activities
- 10 futures methods cards to expand the timeline of your project

How to Play

1. Decide which phase you are in for a current project.
2. Find a present method that helps address your challenge.
3. Choose a futures method. Discuss how you would adapt your present method with this futures lens.
4. Try out methods with your team for current and next-administration policy and service challenges.

PHASE

PLAN



PHASE

PLAN

Align on project scope and prepare to conduct research.

Scope

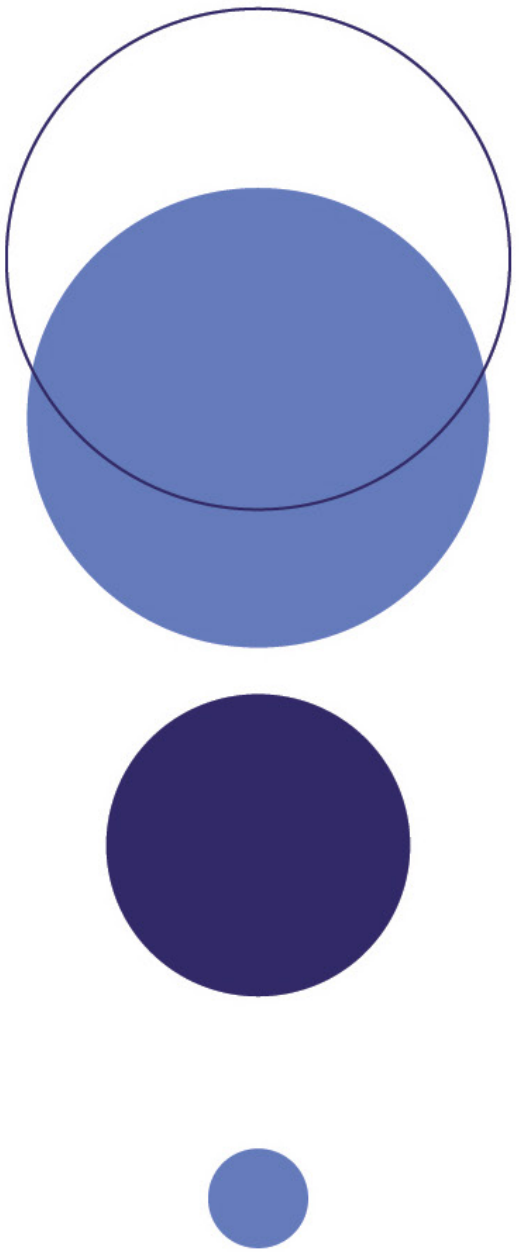
Clarify project stakeholders, inquiry areas, and desired outcomes.

Prepare

Develop research tools and identify research participants.

PHASE

DISCOVER



PHASE

DISCOVER

Capture user experiences and generate new concepts.

Research

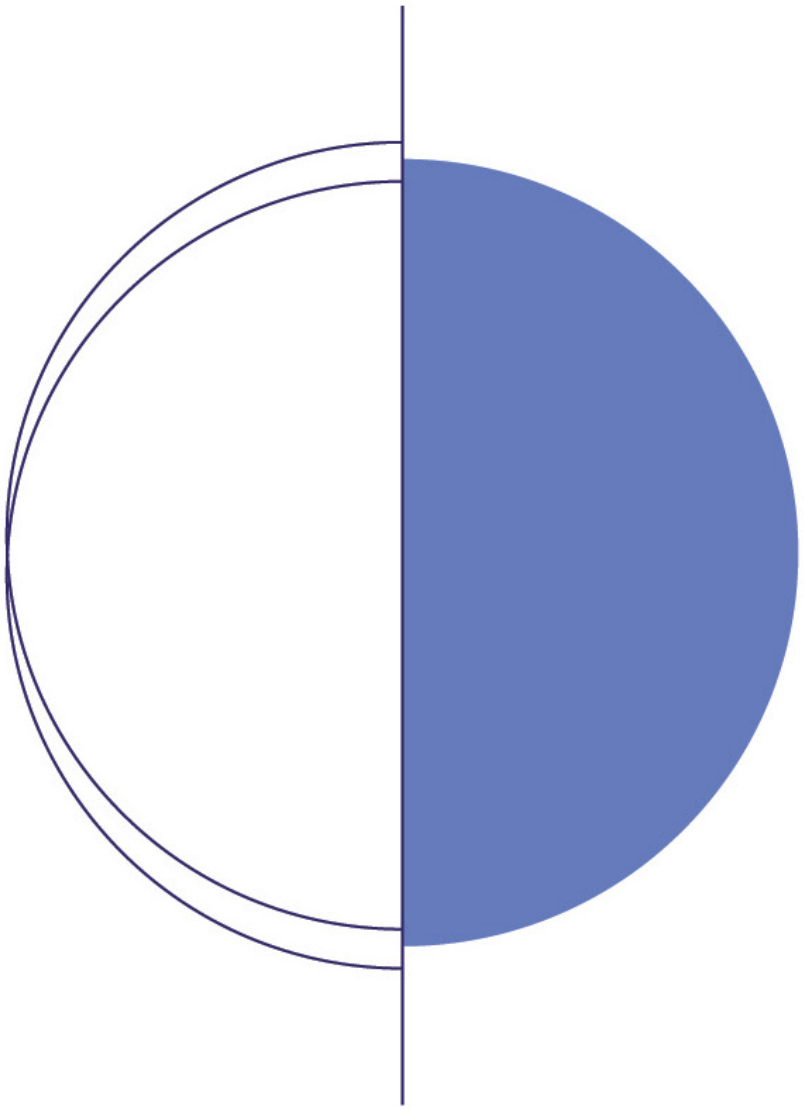
Uncover service opportunities, challenges, and lived experiences of service users and staff.

Synthesize

Analyze research data to identify patterns and generate preliminary design concepts.

PHASE

DESIGN



PHASE

DESIGN

Co-create viable prototypes and prepare for pilot.

Co-Design

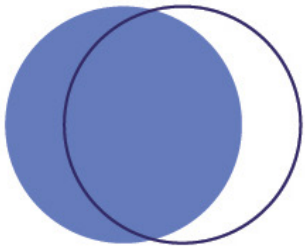
Collaboratively develop and iterate on prototypes with project stakeholders.

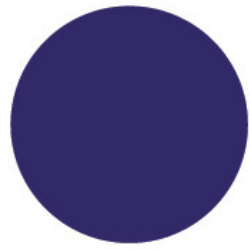
Stage

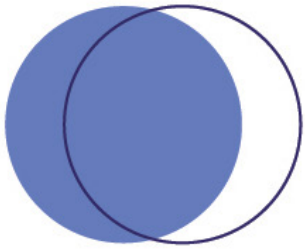
Recruit pilot participants and prepare interventions for real-world testing.

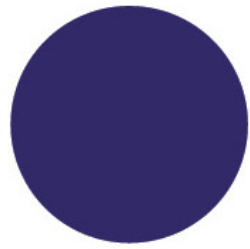
PHASE

DEPLOY









PHASE

DEPLOY

Pilot prototypes and use findings to redesign interventions.

Test

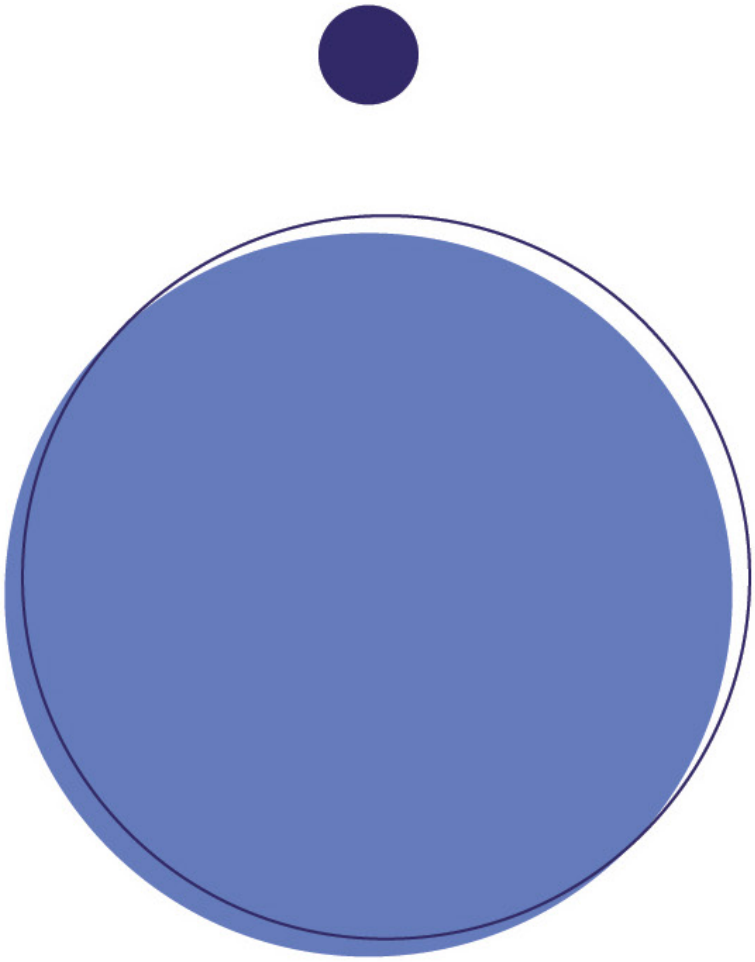
Evaluate prototype impact and gather feedback during the pilot.

Redesign

Apply pilot learnings to refine prototypes and finalize interventions.

PHASE

SCALE



PHASE

SCALE

Implement interventions at scale and share project impact.

Integrate

Help partners embed tools, products, or processes into their workflows.

Share

Communicate project impact and learnings to relevant audiences.

PRESENT METHOD

SYSTEM MAPPING

Map the elements, people, and relationships that make up a system.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN

PRESENT METHOD

SYSTEM MAPPING

1. Place your service or organization at the center of a blank canvas.
2. Add in all the **people, agencies, organizations,** and **external forces** that shape your service.
3. Draw **connecting lines** to show relationships, dependencies, and flows of power or information between elements.
4. Step back and discuss: where are the **pressure points**, **gaps**, or **opportunities** for intervention?

PRESENT METHOD

ASSUMPTION MAPPING

Surface what your team is taking for granted and what you don’t know.

Frequently used in:

PLAN DISCOVER

PRESENT METHOD

ASSUMPTION MAPPING

1. Write down your **assumptions** — things you believe to be true but haven't verified — about the problem, the people affected, and the project.
2. Next, capture **curiosities**. These are open questions your team wants to explore.
3. Sort assumptions by two dimensions: how much **confidence** you have in them, and how **critical** they are to your project's success.
4. Prioritize the **high-stakes, low-confidence** assumptions. Use them to develop research questions.

PRESENT METHOD

AFFINITY MAPPING

Organize your research data into themes and clusters to see where insights emerge.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

AFFINITY MAPPING

1. Separate your research data into **individual data points**. Write each point on individual sticky notes (virtual or physical).
2. Start looking for **patterns** or **themes** between points. Physically cluster connected notes together.
3. Label your clusters and **write a few sentences** describing their themes. You may also group clusters together under larger categories.
4. Discuss what findings have been revealed. Have you uncovered **user needs** or **design opportunities**?

PRESENT METHOD

JOURNEY MAPPING

Build a shared understanding of how users navigate your service.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN | SCALE

PRESENT METHOD

JOURNEY MAPPING

1. Identify a **goal** or **task** to map, such as submitting an application or scheduling an appointment.
2. Map each step the service user takes from start to finish. Note what they're **doing**, **thinking**, and **feeling** at each stage.
3. Layer in **backstage activity**: staff actions, systems, and handoffs.
4. Mark **pain points** and **design opportunities**. Invite real users to review and correct the map.

PRESENT METHOD

EMPATHY MAPPING

Build an understanding of a service user's attitudes and behaviors.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

EMPATHY MAPPING

1. Draw a grid with four quadrants: **Says, Thinks, Feels,** and **Does**.
2. Populate each quadrant with **observations** and **direct quotes** from your research.
3. Look for **tensions** across quadrants. Note instances where what someone says doesn't match what they do.
4. Discuss what the patterns reveal about **unmet needs** or **opportunities for intervention**.

PRESENT METHOD

POWER TOOLS

Identify who holds power in a system, how it flows, and how you can redistribute it.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN

PRESENT METHOD

POWER TOOLS

1. List the **key actors** in your service system: frontline staff, managers, policymakers, organizations, and members of the public.
2. Identify what kind of **power** each actor holds, such as formal power, resource control, information access, or community trust.
3. Map how power **flows** between actors. Note where it's concentrated, contested, or absent.
4. Discuss how your work can **redistribute power** more equitably.

PRESENT METHOD

CONTEXTUAL OBSERVATION

Watch how people behave in their environments to understand real-world behaviors and workflows.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

CONTEXTUAL OBSERVATION

1. Arrange to **observe** participants when they interact with your service, such as in a waiting room, home, community center, or in a digital interface.
2. Take **detailed notes** on how they navigate spaces, use tools, and interact with staff.
3. Avoid intervening. Note **workarounds, frustrations,** and moments of **ease**.
4. Debrief with participants afterward. Ask them to **explain** certain behaviors or decisions.

PRESENT METHOD

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Uncover people's needs and motivations through open, guided conversations.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Write a discussion guide with **open-ended** questions about participants' experiences.
2. Use the guide as a **roadmap**, not a script. Ask follow-up questions and probe on unexpected detours.
3. Record **with consent**, ideally on video. Jot down time important points with timestamps.
4. Later, **organize** and **tag** data points from the interview transcript for further analysis.

PRESENT METHOD

CULTURAL PROBE

Give participants tools to capture their lived experience in their own time and context.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

CULTURAL PROBE

1. Design a **kit of activities** participants can complete independently, like written prompts, photo journals, or short voice memos.
2. Keep instructions **minimal** and **open-ended** to encourage personal documentation.
3. Have participants **document** daily routines, service interactions, or moments of frustration.
4. Review the materials with participants in a **follow-up interview**. Ask them to explain their thought process or motivations.

PRESENT METHOD

SHARED NEEDS

Identify what different groups of users have in common to design solutions with a broad impact.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER DEPLOY

SHARED NEEDS

1. List the distinct **groups** of people who interact with your service.
2. For each group, write out their key **needs** and **pain points**.
3. Compare the lists. Highlight what appears **across multiple groups**.
4. Focus your design effort on **common ground**. Solutions that address shared needs tend to be more durable and equitable.

PRESENT METHOD

SERVICE BLUEPRINT

Visualize the relationship between people, tools, and processes in a service.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | SCALE

PRESENT METHOD

SERVICE BLUEPRINT

1. Map each **step** a service user takes to complete their goal.
2. Add the **‘front stage’** interactions, moments where users and staff directly engage.
3. Add **‘backstage’** processes and support systems, showing what happens out of view.
4. Use the completed map to identify **handoff points**, **gaps**, and **opportunities** for intervention.

PRESENT METHOD

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP

Bring together multiple stakeholders to develop solutions collaboratively.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN

PRESENT METHOD

CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP

1. Invite a **mix** of participants: frontline staff, agency leadership, and members of the public affected by your service.
2. Plan activities for participants to **design solutions together**. Try to make it tangible, such as mapping workflows, brainstorming on a whiteboard, or quick prototyping.
3. Watch for **power dynamics**. Use facilitation techniques that create space for quieter voices.
4. Close by **synthesizing** together what emerged and sharing how it will shape next steps.

PRESENT METHOD

LO-FI PROTOTYPING

Test concepts quickly through early stage, low-detail representations and mock-ups.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN

PRESENT METHOD

LO-FI PROTOTYPING

1. Choose an **idea** to prototype. Use what you have on hand, such as paper, sticky notes, markers, or index cards.
2. Focus on representing the **core interaction** you want to test, without worrying about aesthetics.
3. Invite staff and members of the public to try it out. Ask them to **think out loud** as they use it.
4. Identify what's unclear or broken. **Revise and repeat** until you've learned whether to scrap the idea or turn it into a Minimum Viable Product (MVP).

PRESENT METHOD

PRIORITIZATION MATRIX

Plot your ideas against two criteria so your team can agree on where to focus.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN

PRESENT METHOD

PRIORITIZATION MATRIX

1. Choose **two dimensions** for evaluation, such as impact vs. effort, or desirability vs. feasibility.
2. Draw a **2x2 grid** with those dimensions as the axes.
3. As a team, **place each idea** on the grid based on your best judgment.
4. Discuss what the matrix tells you about where to focus. Start with **high-impact, lower-effort** ideas. Defer or drop high-effort, lower-impact ones.

PRESENT METHOD

A/B TESTING

Compare two versions of a design with users to see which one performs better.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

A/B TESTING

1. Identify an element you want to **test**, such as a form layout, written content, or a process step.
2. Create **two** distinct versions.
3. Define what **success** looks like: completion rates, comprehension, time on task, or satisfaction.
4. Show each version to a comparable group of users. Ask them to complete the task or use the tool while **thinking out loud**.
5. Analyze results. Discuss what drove any **differences** and apply findings to your final design.

PRESENT METHOD

USABILITY TESTING

Find where people get stuck in your service and make quick adjustments.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

USABILITY TESTING

1. Recruit **participants** who reflect the people who will actually use your service.
2. Give each person a realistic task to complete. Ask them to **think out loud** as they go.
3. Observe **without intervening**. Note where people hesitate, backtrack, or make errors.
4. Ask **follow-up questions** after the participant is done with the task.
5. Revise the design and **test again**.

PRESENT METHOD

POLICY SANDBOX

Create a controlled environment to test new policies or service models before committing to full implementation.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

POLICY SANDBOX

1. Define the policy change or service model you want to **test**.
2. Identify the **rules** or **constraints** that currently prevent it.
3. Work with leadership and legal teams to establish **sandbox boundaries**, a controlled test environment without those constraints.
4. Recruit a **small group** to experience the model. Document their experiences and feedback.
5. Evaluate against the current-state baseline. Use findings to refine and build the case for **broader implementation**.

PRESENT METHOD

INTERNAL RETRO

Create space to zoom out, reflect on the project, and capture learnings for organizational improvement.

Frequently used in:

ALL PHASES

PRESENT METHOD

INTERNAL RETRO

1. Gather your team at the **end** of a project phase or milestone.
2. Work through **five prompts**: shoutouts, what worked, what didn't, what to adjust, and lessons to carry forward.
3. Capture responses **visually** so everyone can see what's emerging.
4. Assign **clear owners** to action items before the session ends.

PRESENT METHOD

FEEDBACK SURVEY

Gather quantitative data about an intervention or pilot program.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PRESENT METHOD

FEEDBACK SURVEY

1. Decide what you need to **measure**: satisfaction, comprehension, behavior change, or tool usage.
2. Write a **short survey** with mostly multiple-choice questions.
3. Add one or two **open-ended** questions for context.
4. Send to participants at **regular intervals** throughout your pilot or test period.
5. Review as a team. Look for **trends** and flag **patterns** showing where an intervention needs refinement.

PRESENT METHOD

SCOPING

Align your team and partners on the project focus and goals.

Frequently used in:

PLAN

PRESENT METHOD

SCOPING

1. Convene **key project stakeholders** to discuss goals, concerns, and assumptions.
2. Define the **problem** you're solving and the **population** you're designing for.
3. Establish the **boundaries** of the project. Identify what's in scope, what's out, and what still needs to be decided.
4. Document agreements in a **project plan** and circulate for approval before moving to research.

PRESENT METHOD

STORYTELLING TOOLKIT

Share impactful, digestible highlights about the project's impact.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DEPLOY | SCALE

PRESENT METHOD

STORYTELLING TOOLKIT

1. Identify the **audiences** you need to reach, such as members of the public, policymakers, or funders.
2. For each audience, **clarify** what they need to know and what action you want them to take.
3. Create content that leads with **real people's stories** showing the project's impact.
4. Publish materials in formats that **fit each channel**, such as one-pagers, slide decks, short videos, or social media posts.

PRESENT METHOD

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepare the organization to adopt and sustain a new service model after your team's involvement.

Frequently used in:

DEPLOY SCALE

PRESENT METHOD

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. Identify **internal stakeholders** affected by the change: frontline staff, managers, IT, legal, HR.
2. For each group, map what's **changing** (workflows, tools, roles) and what **support** they'll need.
3. Develop a communication and training plan that introduces changes. Identify **who is responsible** for each aspect of implementation.
4. Set up **ongoing check-ins** to surface resistance, confusion, or unintended consequences.

PRESENT METHOD

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

Create materials and processes to engage community members thoughtfully and ethically.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

1. Identify the communities you want to engage and any **barriers** to participation, such as language, trust, access, or time.
2. Develop materials in **plain language,** such as consent forms, recruitment flyers, and compensation. You should **always** compensate members of the public for their time.
3. Establish how you'll handle **participant data**, and make that clear in consent materials.
4. Build **relationships** with community organizations who can help you recruit participants.

PRESENT METHOD

POLICY ANALYSIS

Review the regulatory landscape shaping your policy or service.

Frequently used in:

PLAN DISCOVER

PRESENT METHOD

POLICY ANALYSIS

1. Identify the **laws, regulations, agency rules**, and **funding requirements** that govern your policy area or service.
2. Note what these regulations require, what they prohibit, and where there is **room for interpretation**.
3. Map gaps or outdated provisions that create **barriers** for the people you're trying to serve.
4. Define what can be implemented now and what will require larger **political change** over time.

PRESENT METHOD

PARTNER CAPACITY-BUILDING

Embed human-centered design skills and processes in partner agencies.

Frequently used in:

ALL PHASES

PRESENT METHOD

PARTNER CAPACITY-BUILDING

1. Assess your agency partners' capacity and knowledge around **design research** and **innovation**.
2. Help fill in the gaps. At each phase of work, provide materials training partners on the **methods** and **frameworks** you're using.
3. Immerse partners in the methods. When possible, **bring them** to research engagements, co-design workshops, or synthesis sessions.
4. As the project is wrapping up, identify what kind of **follow-up support** is needed to help them continue the work internally.

TIMELINE EXTENSION

Project a system or challenge into the future to explore how it might evolve over a longer timeframe.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN

TIMELINE EXTENSION

1. Choose a project output to **extend**, like a system map or journey map.
2. Revisit the output through a future lens, specifically the **next-administration timeframe** of 5-12 years in the future.
3. Ask: what has **changed**, what **new actors or forces** are in play, and what conditions **no longer exist**?
4. Discuss what the **future picture** reveals about your current assumptions and priorities.

SIGNALS & DRIVERS

Scan the forces shaping your topic to surface early signs of change and anticipate where things are heading.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER | DESIGN

SIGNALS & DRIVERS

1. Identify **signals** — products, policies, events, or experiences that give us a hint about the future we're heading toward.
2. Map the **drivers** behind those signals, such as technological, political, social, or economic forces likely to shape the future.
3. Consider how drivers provide **context** for your signals: what conditions gave rise to them, and what do they imply about where things are headed?
4. Discuss what the signals and drivers together **reveal** about what your intervention should address.

IMMERSIVE FUTURES EXPERIENCE

Place participants inside a future scenario to generate more creative brainstorming.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER DESIGN

IMMERSIVE FUTURES EXPERIENCE

1. Identify a **plausible future scenario** relevant to your project.
2. Design cues that help participants feel **situated** in that future: props, role-play prompts, or environmental details.
3. Invite participants to **inhabit the scenario**. Ask them to make decisions or navigate a situation as if it were real.
4. Debrief. What surprised them? What felt familiar? What would they want to change?

POCKETS OF THE FUTURE

Find people and situations that already represent a probable future to design with now.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | DEPLOY

POCKETS OF THE FUTURE

1. Describe what a likely **future user** or **context** looks like for your project area.
2. Identify if this future **already exists somewhere today**. Look for communities or situations where the conditions you're exploring are already present.
3. Recruit from those communities for **research** and **co-design** activities.
4. Treat their current experiences as a **preview** of future needs.

BACKCASTING

Start from a desirable future and work backward to identify what needs to happen now to get there.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER

FUTURES METHOD

BACKCASTING

1. Describe a specific, **desirable** future state for your service or policy area. Be concrete about what has changed and for whom.
2. Ask: what would have to be true **five years** before that future to make it possible? Work backward in increments.
3. Identify the **decisions** and **interventions** that would need to happen at each stage.
4. Map those milestones onto your **current project timeline**.

FUTURES WHEEL

Map the cascading consequences of a change.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN | SCALE

FUTURES WHEEL

1. Write a **single** change, trend, or development at the center of a blank page.
2. Identify the **immediate consequences** of that change. Write them as spokes radiating outward, like a wheel.
3. For each consequence, identify its **downstream effects**. Add another ring of spokes.
4. Review the full map. Which consequences are **most significant** for your work? Which consequences are **most uncertain**?

FUTURES METHOD

THREE HORIZONS

Map the tension between the present system, the emerging future, and what has to change in between.

Frequently used in:

DISCOVER | DESIGN

FUTURES METHOD

THREE HORIZONS

1. Draw **three overlapping curves** across a timeline. Label them Horizon 1, 2, and 3.
2. Populate Horizon 1, **the current system**: what characterizes the current system, where is it working, and where is it failing?
3. Populate Horizon 3, **the future system**: what emerging patterns or new ways of doing things are beginning to take shape?
4. Populate Horizon 2, **the bridge** between the present and future: what innovations and transitional efforts are underway?
5. Map where your project sits and how it supports the **transition**.

FUTURES TRIANGLE

Weigh the forces pushing change, pulling toward a vision, and holding the present in place.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER

FUTURES TRIANGLE

1. Draw a triangle with three corners: **pushes** (forces driving change), **pulls** (visions attracting people toward a different future), and **weights** (barriers keeping the present in place).
2. Populate each corner with **forces** relevant to your issue area.
3. Discuss which corner is currently the **strongest**.
4. Use the triangle to discuss where to **focus energy**: amplifying pulls, accelerating pushes, or reducing weights.

ARTIFACTS FROM THE FUTURE

Make a possible future tangible by creating objects or documents from that imagined world.

Frequently used in:

DESIGN | DEPLOY | SCALE

ARTIFACTS FROM THE FUTURE

1. Choose a **future scenario** to bring to life related to your policy or service challenge.
2. Design an **artifact** that would plausibly exist in that world: a policy document, a form, a news headline, or an instruction manual.
3. Make it **feel real**. Use realistic language and details from future your scenario.
4. Use the artifact to **provoke a reaction** from project stakeholders. Ask yourselves: “Do we want to live in a world where this exists?”

FUTURES METHOD

2X2 SCENARIO PLANNING

Generate four distinct future scenarios by pushing two key uncertainties to their extremes.

Frequently used in:

PLAN | DISCOVER

FUTURES METHOD

2X2 SCENARIO PLANNING

1. Identify two **high-impact**, **high-uncertainty** drivers in your policy area (such as “economic stability” and “public trust in government”).
2. Draw a 2x2 grid with each driver as an axis, ranging from one **extreme** to the other.
3. Name and describe each quadrant. What does a “high trust/low stability” world look like versus a “low trust/high stability” world?
4. Test your **current thinking** against each scenario. Where does it hold up? Where does it fail?
5. Identify approaches that fit **across** multiple scenarios.

ABOUT PPL

PUBLIC POLICY LAB

The **Public Policy Lab** is a nonprofit innovation lab for the public sector based in Brooklyn, New York. We apply human-centered methods from product design, behavioral science, and technology development to the challenges facing low-income people.