

Public Engagement: Future Spaces, Places & Faces

What is it?

Future Spaces, Places and Faces is an exercise designed by The University of Birmingham Public Engagement Team for public engagement professionals and practitioners to consider how we best manage the sometimes conflicting demands of these roles. Whilst we must be goals-driven and strategic, it is critical that we are also able to respond to changing conditions and unpredictable situations. Therefore we wanted to investigate how we can improve our own practice and give better advice as a community that takes into account the nuanced, dynamic and constantly evolving reality of the engagement environment.

Future Spaces, Places and Faces was originally designed for the NCCPE's 2018 Engage Conference, but we want to develop it further for use with researchers and public engagement facilitators of all kinds and in different settings. Therefore, we have made this online resource freely available for you to download, print out and play with. All we ask is that you let us know what you think. Or if you would like us to deliver this training in person, get in touch at engage@contacts.bham.ac.uk or Tweet us @UoBengage.

What are the aims?

The approach is gamified, but there is no winning formula. Instead the game is about working through different scenarios in groups that represent a range of PE experiences. Your working scenario is 'foretold' to you through the picking of a hand of cards in different suits, then you use the Future Spaces, Places and Faces to create a programme of one or more public engagement activities based on the hand you've drawn.

You must also consider the difficult questions around what you actually need to do to get this idea off the ground: What are the core values or aims of the activity? Who do you need to win over? How much will it cost and how will you fund it? How will you draw in audiences and participants? And what assumptions and risks have you made?

Then it's time to test the thinking behind these answers as you are dealt a twist of fate through 'fortune' and 'jeopardy' cards. Now the task is to think about how your approach or activity would change and why, whether these changes compromise your values and aims and what you need to do to make things work. Finally we ask you to reflect on the differences in how people within the group approached or reacted and what this might tell us about effective ways of working in public engagement.



How do I play?

1. **Assemble into small teams** (up to around 6) and take a deck of cards and a worksheet for each group. You can run this activity with just one group, or even along, but we think it works best with more players to ensure a range of different views which you can compare, discuss and learn from afterwards.
2. **Shuffle the deck** of cards , place them face down in 'suits' (Place, Space, Face, Method, Jeopardy, Fortune, and Joker. Leave Research Themes face up and put the blank card aside.
3. **Choose a Research Theme** card, note why this is appealing (plus whether any are rejected by the group outright and why)
4. **Draw your starting hand**, keeping the cards face down until you have chosen:
Place (Locality setting): choose 1 (of 3)
Space (Venue type): choose 1 (of 4)
Face (Target audiences): choose 2 (of 9)
Method (Activity type): choose 2 (of 8)
5. **Set out your hand**, discuss and begin to **populate the front, left-hand sections** of your worksheet, creating a title and description for your activity(ies) as well as some plans around audience targeting/marketing and budget.
6. **Start to populate the right-hand sections**, considering the core aims or values of the activity, where opportunities or allies might exist, what risks may be inherent or where you may be challenged, and any assumptions or anything specific to your experience that might not work in other settings.
7. **Draw your twist of fate**, keeping the cards face down until you have chosen:
Jeopardy (Challenge to overcome): choose 1 (of 4)
Fortune (Opportunity knocks): choose 1 (of 4)
Joker ('flip' a card to draw a red line): choose 1
8. **Flip over your worksheet** and begin to work through the back sections, noting what changes you would make, whether the restrictions or changes you now face mean you feel compromised and lead you to eliminate a card using your joker and any differences of opinion.
9. **Give all groups an opportunity to feed back**, explaining their scenario and thinking and any take-home messages they've developed.

Notes:

- You can spend as long on this exercise as is useful. As a guide we recommend spending no longer than an hour on it: 10 minutes to familiarise yourselves with the concept and rules, 20 minutes to set out your initial plan, 15 minutes to respond to your 'twist of fate' and using the final 15 minutes to discuss and reflect on the exercise and any learning.
- We've provided a blank card to enable you to make your own additions
- The game tests many different restrictions, so we decided not to dictate a set budget, but it may be very useful to experiment with this. Particularly when trying to model what could be done for different levels of investment
- When considering who to run this activity with, you may wish to think about inviting sceptical voices or those with little experience of the realities of public engagement. Their perspective may add an extra layer of realism/difficulty or you might even create a new ally.

