The use of futures applications in regional development work requires careful and thoughtful preparation. This applies to the choice of the specific futures tools to be used (see section 4 of the Toolkit); but it equally applies to the understanding of the context within which the futures exercise will be carried out. In particular there are (at least) 4 key issues that need to fully discussed and agreed upon before the exercise can get underway or indeed before the exercise can be launched effectively. These key issues are inter-related and should not be understood to operate in a strictly linear thought process - the issues, reflections on them and the decisions taken on them are iterative, dynamic and may not be concluded before setting out on the futures exercise. However, a final “check-through” of logic, rationale and implications should be carried out.

**Competency & legitimacy**

The lead organisation in the exercise must have legitimacy or competence in terms of governance to effectively deliver the exercise. E.g. for a community organisation develop a technology strategy based on a futures exercise would not be feasible. It has neither the technical nor the policy or governance competence. The leaders of the exercise should be sure that they will be able to deliver not only the futures exercise but the implementation of the results or risk wasting a great deal of effort; resource and goodwill.

**Scope of the exercise**

The scope of the exercise will be determined by the objectives & motivation and should be clear (with timescales and outputs defined) and realistic given resources. In particular the extent of information needs and availability will be important factors to consider as will the ability of the lead organisation to deliver the exercise. This latter aspect will also influence the breadth and nature of engagement with other stakeholders.

**Level & type of engagement**

Stakeholder engagement is at the heart of most futures exercises. Consideration needs to be given to the list of stakeholders needed; the timing and depth of their involvement and the gaps in stakeholder support that may be apparent at the outset. The scope of the planned exercise and the comparative competency of the lead organisations will influence the engagement needed as will the ability and willingness of stakeholders to satisfy the information needs of the exercise.

**Information & data**

Information is the foundation of a futures exercise and its availability is critical, however, the needs of the futures exercise will be determined by the scope of the exercise and the availability of information will be strongly influenced by resources but also by the type and depth of stakeholder engagement (as suppliers of sources of information) and by the competency of the lead organisation to request the necessary information from other tiers of government; academic or industry group.
Bear in mind that these considerations are not exhaustive and may not be linear. You may need to begin your considerations with Legitimacy and competence rather than Determining the scope for instance.

Wherever you begin to consider these issues you will find that they are closely intertwined and you will need to move towards achieving a resolution of the issues in parallel.

### CHECK LIST OF QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

**Determining the scope of the exercise**

1. What are your objectives and motivations in conducting a futures exercise?
   - Do these readily suggest the scope for your exercise?
   - Are the objectives and motivations compatible with the scope or focus that you have in mind?
   - Are you confident that you are going to achieve your objectives by focusing on the areas or topics that you have identified for your futures exercise?

2. Do you think that you will have the resources necessary for an exercise of this scope and focus? (See also: Information & data)

3. Is the scope in line with the remit, role or responsibilities of the lead organisation? (See also: Competency & legitimacy)

4. Does the scope that you have chosen lead you to a clear list of other stakeholders or actors who you will need to engage in the exercise? (See also: Level & type of engagement)

If you answer NO to any of these questions then you should spend further time confirming your objectives: clarifying the scope of the exercise; potentially extend and strengthen your partners and stakeholders group or seek additional resources to allow the required information and data to match the scope that you have decided upon.

### Competency & Legitimacy

Having decided on your objectives and an initial scope for the exercise:

1. Are you sure that the lead body has the legal or administrative competence to conduct an exercise of this scope? (See also: Determining the Scope)

2. Does the lead body or its partners have the technical competence to carry through the exercise? (See also: Information & data and Level & type of engagement)

3. Do you need additional partners or expertise to achieve the results of the exercise (See also: Level & type of Engagement)

4. Does your lead body or its partners in the futures exercise intend to implement the results of the exercise? If so, does it have the legitimacy and competence to implement or, if it does not intend to implement the results, does it have the necessary ‘political capital’ to use its partner’s time in this way? (See also: Scope and Level & type of engagement)
If you answer NO to any of these questions then you may need to reconsider the scope of the exercise; seek a new lead body or extend and strengthen the group of stakeholders for the exercise.

**Information & Data**

The scope of the futures exercise will determine, to a large extent, the type and source of information and data that you will need. However information has a monetary as well as a political cost.

1. Do you think that you will have the resources necessary for an exercise of this scope and focus? (See also: Scope of the exercise)

2. Will your partners and stakeholders that you engage with during the exercise be able or willing to contribute the necessary information (both codified & tacit)? (See also: Legitimacy & competence and Level & type of engagement)

3. Does the lead body carry sufficient political ‘weight’ or political ‘capital’ to ensure the availability of the information from others including academia or industry group? (See also: Legitimacy & competence)

If you answer NO to any of these questions then you may need to go back and reassess your objectives; the scope of the exercise; the identity of the lead body and key stakeholders or seek alternative routes to access the required information and data.

**Level & Type of Engagement**

While stakeholder engagement is at the heart of futures exercises, the range of stakeholders needed and their precise involvement in the exercise may not be immediately clear.

1. Is the scope of the futures exercise proposed complementary to the list of stakeholders and partners with which you intend to engage? (See also: Determining the Scope)

2. Are the proposed stakeholders and partners in agreement with the objectives, scope and leadership of the futures exercise? (See also: Determining the Scope and Legitimacy & competence)

3. Are the stakeholders and partners able and willing to help satisfy the information needs of the exercise? (See also: Information & data)

4. Do the proposed stakeholders and partners bring the required legitimacy and technical competencies to the futures exercise? (See also: Legitimacy and competence)

If you answer NO to any of these questions then you may need to go back and reassess the scope of the exercise; the list of key stakeholders and partners that you have in mind or seek alternative routes to access the required information and data.

You should now:

- **Understand** the issues that need to be considered in preparing for a futures exercise
- **Have answered** the critical questions set out in the Check list
- **Be ready** to launch a futures exercise