



Rijksoverheid

the Future at the Table

A method to involve, safeguard and integrate the future in policy- and decision-making processes of today

Colofoon

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Personal introduction

Our greatest inheritance is not what we leave behind, but what we pass on to the future!



In today's rush, we sometimes forget the far-reaching impact of our decisions:

What is now bureaucratically called a 'residential development site' will soon become a home for the families of tomorrow—a place where children grow up and lives take shape.

What we now technically refer to as a 'reservation zone for a dike' will, in the future, be a silent protector—a safe boundary behind which generations can live, work, and dream. An icon that keeps not only water but also worries at bay.

The choices we make here and now shape the land, the lives, and the stories of future generations. What if we inherited the eyes of our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren? And looked through their eyes at the choices we make today—our choices? Would we still make the same decisions?

That is a question we should ask ourselves more often. The Future at the Table will help us do just that. Ensuring that the future has a permanent seat at the discussion table—not through an empty chair or a representative, but through ourselves.

So that we continue to chart a course that does justice to both today's residents and tomorrow's needs. So that we leave behind a legacy for the children of the future. A legacy we can be proud of. Because our greatest inheritance is not what we leave behind, but what we pass on to the future.

Mare de Wit

Initiator Future at the Table

Summary

The Future of the Netherlands is on the Drawing Board. The choices we make today shape the 'new normal' of tomorrow. Toekomst aan Tafel - in English: Future at the Table- offers an inspiring approach to steering a future-oriented course—one that serves both the interests of today's citizens and those of future generations.

The future of the Netherlands is shaped by the decisions we make today. However, the voice of future generations is currently absent in these decisions, which can lead to burdens being passed on—a shortcoming acknowledged by the 'premier Schoof' Cabinet with its **commitment to "not shifting problems onto our children and grandchildren."** This principle is also upheld by various government bodies, including the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and the Delta Commissioner's Office.

But how do we ensure that these good intentions are truly embedded in practice—not only in the fields of water and climate adaptation but also in other sectors? To address this, Future at the Table was launched in February 2024. This initiative, led by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, the Delta Commissioner's Office, and Rijkswaterstaat, aims to develop a practical approach that structurally integrates the perspectives of both current and future generations into policy development.

At the core of Future at the Table lies a simple but crucial message: **actions, not words—let's get to work!** This report's key recommendation is to move beyond discussion and take concrete steps. By doing so, we can foster a culture where thinking about the future is no longer optional but becomes a structural and inspiring part of policymaking and decision-making.

This won't happen automatically—change needs champions. A crucial role in implementing Future at the Table is played by the Future Ambassador. With one foot firmly in practice and the other in society, the Future Ambassador acts as a figurehead and representative of the sector, actively contributing to a forward-looking cultural shift. In doing so, the sector becomes more accessible and receptive to society at large. The Future Ambassador works alongside Future Trainers—dedicated professionals who inspire and facilitate change within the workplace, helping integrate this new way of working. The water and climate adaptation sector is already highly future-oriented. This initiative will reinforce and elevate that approach. A sector that has shaped and safeguarded the Netherlands for decades is now in a unique position to lead the way in embedding Toekomst aan Tafel into policy. **There is a real opportunity to inspire other sectors to follow suit—especially at a time when the 'new normal' is being established and when the principle of not shifting burdens onto the future is gaining broad recognition, both inside and outside the government.**

Future at the Table aims to provide an inspiring and effective method for more transparent and future-proof policymaking and decision-making. The goal is to distribute both the benefits and the burdens of our choices fairly—across today's and tomorrow's generations alike. **In short: let's act fairly now—so that both today and the future benefit.**

The reason and purpose of this project

Why should we put the Future at the Table?

1.1 Today's Decisions Shape the Future

The water and climate adaptation sector is actively working on a 'new normal' for tomorrow—together with urban planners, energy companies, and many other stakeholders. The goal is to make decisions that benefit not only the current generation but also those who come after us.

The future of the Netherlands is being shaped by the choices we make today: where we build new housing, how we develop our energy grid, and how we allocate space for water. The decisions we take now, and how we respond to current challenges, will not only affect us but will also have lasting consequences for future generations. By acting with foresight today and bringing Toekomst aan Tafel into the conversation, we can prevent today's challenges from escalating into major crises for those who come after us. Long-term planning is not just about infrastructure—it is about shaping the future of our country and the lives of the people who will live in it.

1.2 An Approach to Involve, Safeguard, and Utilize the Voice of the Future

Toekomst aan Tafel is built on three core principles:

1. **Involving** both current and future generations in decision-making.
2. **Safeguarding** policies to prevent passing on problems to future generations.
3. **Utilizing** the insights gained to influence decisions meaningfully.

In February 2024, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, the Delta Commissioner's Office, and Rijkswaterstaat launched this initiative with two overarching goals:

- Identifying and preventing the transfer of burdens to future generations.
- Enhancing trust and engagement among citizens of all generations.

To achieve these goals, the initiative focuses on three key actions:

1. Involving current generations (physically) and future generations (mentally) in policymaking by using the developed intergenerational stakeholder analysis and future design method
2. Safeguarding decisions by assessing whether they shift burdens to the future and discussing necessary adjustments by using the developed generational test for insights on whether we shift burdens, and an intergenerational dialogue in whether we think that is acceptable
3. Utilizing these insights in decision-making, ensuring that the influence of these steps is visible and measurable, by reporting the developed Future Impact Assessment where you 'comply or explain' the prevention of spill-over effect to future generations

With this structured approach, Toekomst aan Tafel offers a transparent and replicable methodology. It ensures that current and future generations are actively included in policymaking, their interests are safeguarded, and their input is effectively used in final decisions.

In essence, this means gathering insights, empathizing, evaluating, discussing, and carefully weighing decisions to ensure they do not place unnecessary burdens on future generations. This approach fosters responsible and sustainable policy development.

Toekomst aan Tafel is built on the principles of involving, safeguarding, and utilizing the voice of the future. To put this into practice, the initiative requires key drivers of change:

- A Future Ambassador who oversees the broader initiative.
- A Future Trainer or Future Friend within organizations to support its implementation.

This approach is not just about discussion—it is about action. The result is a motivating, practical method that policymakers and decision-makers can follow, ensuring that future perspectives are structurally embedded in decision-making.

How it works:

1. Involving stakeholders: Identify whose (future) interests need to be considered.
2. Safeguarding policies: Make these interests visible, ensuring they are integrated into decisions.
3. Utilizing insights: Apply this information transparently to influence and justify decisions.

Each step is supported by concrete interventions, providing structure and ensuring accountability—a crucial factor in this field.

Unlike one-off initiatives, Toekomst aan Tafel requires a long-term, organization-wide commitment. Each organization appoints Future Trainers (or Future Friends), a dedicated colleague responsible for promoting future-oriented thinking and working according to the Toekomst aan Tafel methodology. These motivated professionals dedicate one day per week to this essential role, leading Future Workshops, facilitating key policy discussions, and ensuring that concrete actions are taken.

With their enthusiasm, Future Trainers bring the future closer, translate vision into action, and help increase transparency for both present and future generations. The Future Ambassador plays a critical role in supporting Future Trainers. Acting as a connector between internal policies and external developments, the Future Ambassador combines scientific, political, and societal insights to guide future-proof policymaking. By working together, Future Trainers and the Future Ambassador ensure that organizations adopt fair and sustainable policies. The ultimate goal? That future-oriented thinking becomes so embedded in decision-making that the roles of Future Trainers and the Future Ambassador are no longer needed.

