

# Experimentation with Serious Games in Government - Impact (foresight game)



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**Organisation:** Policy Horizons Canada (Horizons)

**Country:** Canada

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** General public services

**Type:** Other

**Launched in:** 2016

**Overall development time:** 6 month(s)

**Link to the innovation's website**

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# Description

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Horizons has been experimenting with serious games and design thinking as part of its efforts to develop innovation tools and new policy and program approaches across the public service. Impact is a board game that combines the discipline of foresight (the method of exploring plausible, alternative futures and identifying what may emerge) with gamification. Impact allows players to explore new technologies as drivers of change, and the potential second order consequences and disruptions that might occur. The content of the game is based on Horizons' MetaScan 3 report, a study that explores how disruptive technologies could shape the economy and society. Horizons has also established a Serious Games Community of Practice for the Government of Canada.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- This innovation was developed as part of Horizons' experimentation business line. Horizons has been experimenting with serious games and design thinking as an alternative policy instrument and as a way to further disseminate its work and engage a broader audience.
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## Objectives

Other

- The purpose of Impact is to challenge and enable individuals—within and outside of government—to:• Experiment with serious games as an alternative policy tool.• Learn about and apply strategic foresight methods and principles to long-term thinking and planning exercises.• Help communicate the work and research of Horizons to both internal and external audiences.
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## Main beneficiaries

General population, Government bodies, Government staff, Other

- The main beneficiaries include:• Public servants within the Government of Canada who play Impact and are exposed to futures thinking.• Government organizations that are exposed to innovative approaches to learning, as well as the importance of foresight in policy and program thinking. • Foresight practitioners, who can use Impact in their teaching or practice.• Ultimately, Canadians, who benefit from more innovative policies and programs.
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## Existing similar practices

**Other serious games have been developed within the Government of Canada (e.g., Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada School of Public Service), in other governments (e.g., US and European Commission) by the private sector (e.g. IBM and Institute for the Future).**

In public administration of my country

Government of Canada and Private Sector

For example, "Scenario Exploration System is a future simulation tool developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre together with experts in serious games from the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies. It uses engagement techniques from the entertainment world to engage participants in the full richness of the systemic collective reflection created when building scenarios." Source: European Commission <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research/foresight/ses>

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# Results

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## Efficiency

- Once the serious game was developed, it became an efficient way to share Horizons' work and engage a broader audience. Since board games require people to come together, they also improve relationships and team building. Impact also has the benefit of boosting innovation and creativity since players need to use their imagination to generate potential impacts of new technologies on Canadians.
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## Effectiveness

- Because serious games involve experiential involvement, they have a much more effective impact on learning compared to traditional pedagogical approaches such as reading.
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## Other improvements

- The evaluation of individual sessions during the development and testing of Impact by public servants - through an evaluation questionnaire - have been very positive.

# Development

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## Design

The idea for a foresight game grew out of Horizons' foresight study on the future of policy instruments. The idea was developed by Horizons' staff and management in an effort to experiment with new innovation policy tools and better serve Canadians. Design time: 2 month(s)

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## Testing

- The game was developed using an iterative process involving workshops, design, prototyping and testing with Horizons' staff, Idea Couture and the Government of Canada Serious Games Community of Practice.

Testing time: 1 month(s)

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- Impact was developed using a human-centred design thinking approach, in order to achieve innovative outputs.

### Resources used:

- Two staff from Horizons and a \$25,000 contract with Idea Couture in Toronto.

Implementation time: 3 month(s)

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## Diffusion

- To extend the game to others, Horizons is using the Serious Games Community of Practice, the Internet (internal and external) and other networks within and outside the Government of Canada. Horizons has also published articles/blogs about the game. Copies of the game are made available to other federal organisations and introductory gaming sessions led by Horizons' gamification experts are organised to ensure that new players understand the full potential of Impact. Idea Couture, the firm who co-developed the game in collaboration with Policy Horizons Canada, recently launched a crowd funding campaign to make Impact available to users outside the federal government.
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## Challenges and solutions

- The main challenge was finding the skills within government to develop a serious game. To overcome this challenge, Horizons contracted an internationally recognized design firm to work with Horizons to co-develop the serious game.
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## Partnerships

### Idea Couture

Private sector

Horizons contracted a design firm in Toronto (Idea Couture) to co-develop the game. This partnership generated secondary benefits since the design firm is also endorsing Impact and games as a business activity on its website (<https://ideacouture.com/impact/>).

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# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- Lessons learned include: • Work with users and have a user-centered approach. • Have the time and resources to prototype and test multiple iterations of the output and maintain frequent interactions with the contractor. • Development of a successful serious game was much more complex and time consuming than initially expected. • Gamification and serious games have the potential to supplement the current suite of government policy levers.
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## Conditions for success

- Conditions for success include: • Support and leadership from senior management to experiment with novel approaches. • Having an innovation culture in the organization and ideally, but not necessarily, a lab space. • Nurturing private and public partnerships to co-produce products and outcomes. • Having the right staff with not only technical skills in design thinking and gamification, but that are also engaged, innovative and have a passion for games.

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