

Participant Instructions (90-minute version)

Welcome! You are about to engage with a short story set in a near-future world where a digital health tool has been introduced into a health care setting. Design Fictions is a story-driven toolkit that uses vignettes and structured prompt cards to help participants collaboratively enter, question, and re-imagine digital health scenarios.

You will engage with these fictional worlds to surface the assumptions, values, and relations that shape what is understood as possible, inevitable, or desirable in each of those worlds. Your task is to enter the world, examine it, and imagine how it might be different.

Step 1 — First Impressions (10 minutes)

Read the story silently and then share your initial observations. This is deliberately unstructured: you will describe what you see before analyzing anything.

Record your observations in the margins of the vignette.

Step 2 — Lens Analysis (20 minutes)

Your group will be assigned 2-3 Lens Cards which you will work through sequentially.

For each lens, you should engage with the fictional world by applying the card's core question and follow-up prompts to the specific details of the story. Pay attention to:

- **Changing conditions:** What happens if you alter key features of the scenario: the funding model, the regulatory environment, the patient population?
- **Competing values:** Where do the interests and commitments of different actors collide? What trade-offs are being made, and by whom?
- **Absent actors:** Who is affected does not appear in the story? What would change if they were present?
- **Downstream consequences:** Trace what happens next. What does success produce? Who absorbs failures?

Record your observations on the response sheet.

Step 3 — Role-Taking and Reimagination (30 minutes)

Now you will shift from analyzing the world to inhabiting it. You will be assigned 1-2 Role Cards. From within that role, you will narrate alternative trajectories:

- **What could happen differently?** Not what should happen in an ideal world, but what could plausibly unfold if specific conditions changed.

- **Under what conditions?** What institutional, political, or interpersonal shifts would be necessary for the alternative to become possible?
- **At what cost?** What would the alternative trajectory require actors to give up, risk, or accept?

Record these on the response sheet.

Step 4 — Share Back (15 minutes)

Share your experiences back with the group. The Share-Back should be a reflective exercise in which you articulate what the fictional world revealed about different assumptions and commitments.

Guiding questions for share-back:

1. **What parts of this world do you want to protect or bring into being?** What features of the imagined future struck your group as genuinely desirable (worth working toward, not just tolerating)?
2. **What parts of this world do you want to prevent?** What features felt unacceptable, even if they emerged from individually reasonable decisions?
3. **How did your thinking change?** What did you assume at the start of the exercise that you no longer assume? What did the lenses or role-taking surface that you had not previously considered?
4. **What insight did this generate?** What is the most valuable provocation, question, or reframing that emerged from engaging with this fictional world; the 'pearl' you would carry into your actual work?

Rules of Play

Stay inside the story. The fictional world is the material. Resist the urge to jump immediately to your own institutional context; the defamiliarization is the point. You will bring it back to your context during share-back.

Observe before you analyze. Use the Opening Card honestly. Describe before you explain. What you notice first, and what you miss, is revealing.

Lenses are additive, not redundant. Each lens surfaces something the others miss. If a lens feels like it's repeating what another already said, push harder, you haven't gone deep enough.

Alternative trajectories are not wish lists. When you narrate an alternative, specify the conditions that would make it possible. Desirability without conditions is sentimentality; conditions without desirability is technocratic.

Disagreement is a resource. If group members see the story differently, that is data. Record the divergence; don't resolve it prematurely.