



# Governance in Cultural Hubs – DOs and DON'Ts Utrecht

*February 2025*



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework  
Programme of  
the European Union.

# Introduction

When creating creative HUBs, effective collaboration is key to achieving sustainable outcomes. To learn more about appropriate and successful governance, the municipality of Utrecht has investigated the key dos and don'ts for fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. This document captures the essential insights from a governance study conducted from March to September 2023 for the municipality of Utrecht as part of the HUB-IN programme. The study aimed to explore effective governance practices and provide actionable recommendations for municipalities seeking to foster collaboration among various stakeholders.

The findings highlight the importance of coordination, feasibility assessment, and strong governance structures in achieving successful outcomes. Additionally, the document includes practical tips and tricks for cultural organizations currently collaborating or planning to do so in the future. These insights are intended to guide municipalities and cultural organizations in enhancing their collaborative efforts, ensuring transparency, and building trust among all parties involved.

## HUB-IN IN UTRECHT

In Utrecht, HUB-IN contributes to the development of the Werkspoorkwartier. The ambition is to transform the Werkspoorkwartier into a 'cultural and circular manufacturing area.' HUB-IN supports the development of the Werkspoorkwartier in the following ways:

- HUB-IN supports the Bedrijvenkring Cartesiusweg in developing into a hub, enabling them to represent the interests of (creative) entrepreneurs in the area and improve the accessibility and attractiveness of the Werkspoorkwartier for the residents of Utrecht.
- Additionally, HUB-IN facilitates an art open call to make the Werkspoorkwartier more attractive to visitors and support cultural entrepreneurs in the area.
- HUB-IN supports talent development programs in the Werkspoorkwartier to increase the area's attractiveness for young artists and cultural entrepreneurs, support cultural incubators, and strengthen collaboration between various parties in the area.
- Investments are also made in developing knowledge about sustainable governance structures for cultural incubators in the Werkspoorkwartier and beyond.

# Lessons learned

## COORDINATION

- Municipalities increasingly act as coordinators, meaning that complex policy development is conducted in collaboration with both internal and external parties.
- This requires strong, competent external stakeholders who are aligned with the nature and scale of the task at hand—organizationally, financially, and content-wise.
- When these criteria are not met, there is a risk of opportunistic or risk-averse behaviour, undermining collective goals in favour of individual interests.
- Insufficient municipal coordination can lead to uncertainty and suboptimal actions by involved parties.

## FEASIBILITY

- Policymaking involves setting objectives, allocating resources, and defining timelines in an integrated manner.
- The coherence of these elements determines the feasibility of achieving the objectives.
- Assessing feasibility requires completing essential steps: setting objectives, defining frameworks, conducting feasibility studies, and providing feedback.
- Poorly aligned frameworks (e.g., financial resources, timelines) can result in unachievable tasks for intended collaborators.
- Objectives need to be matched with adequate resources to avoid placing excessive risk on executing parties who may lack the capacity to manage it.

## CHANGE AGENT

- Organizations initiating transformation processes can appoint a change agent to lead the effort.
- Effective change management requires decision-making authority and the ability to implement changes.
- Without sufficient mandate, the role of a change agent is reduced to that of an advisor, limiting the impact of their work.
- For such processes, municipalities can also provide targeted subsidies to enable stakeholders to hire their own change agents.

## INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

- Municipalities often consist of distinct units, such as implementation organizations and development departments, each with unique interests and responsibilities.

- Alignment and coordination among these units are crucial for projects involving multiple stakeholders.
- Miscommunication or conflicting interests between units can hinder progress, emphasizing the need for unified municipal leadership.
- Joint consultations and better coordination among units significantly improve outcomes.

## SCALE AND CAPACITY

- Ambitions must align with organizational and financial capacity to avoid overextension.
- Large-scale initiatives require robust organizations capable of meeting the demands of the task.
- Collaborating organizations are advised to thoroughly evaluate their plans, potentially seeking municipal input or third-party evaluations.
- Managing and operating facilities requires a level of organizational maturity that must be in place for sustainable success.

## GOVERNANCE

- Governance encompasses the structures and processes ensuring accountability and effective decision-making within organizations.
- Proper governance safeguards stakeholders' interests and ensures efficient and transparent operations.
- Dysfunctional governance can lead to conflicts of interest, deadlock, and failure to fulfil responsibilities.
- Governance structures should align with the scale and objectives of the organization, taking into account diverse stakeholder interests.

## GOVERNANCE BEST PRACTICES

- Adhering to governance codes helps cultural organizations establish trust and accountability, ensuring effective oversight and responsibility.
- Adequate time and expertise should be allocated to developing governance models that suit the objectives, collaboration, and organizational context.
- Rushed decisions in governance can lead to inefficiencies and unintended consequences, particularly in complex collaborations.

## THOUGHTFUL PLANNING

- Successful collaborations require deliberate and well-structured planning, supported by a step-by-step approach agreed upon by all parties.
- Hastily formed arrangements often result in unforeseen issues emerging later in the process.



- Ensuring transparency in decision-making and adhering to mutually agreed frameworks minimizes risks and enhances trust.

## STRONG FOUNDATIONS

- Feasibility studies are essential to determine whether the frameworks for an assignment are sufficiently robust.
- Involving external parties, including those expected to execute the task, ensures a well-rounded evaluation.
- These studies should result in a solid foundation to launch the initiative effectively.

## TRANSPARENCY

- A well-organized administrative structure is crucial for executing complex assignments.
- It is essential to promptly report any inadequacies in the established frameworks to stakeholders.
- Transparency about challenges enables stakeholders to take corrective actions in a timely manner.
- A lack of transparency regarding financial constraints can lead to preventable issues, including financial instability and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON COLLABORATION

- Collaboration involves pursuing a shared goal through the combined efforts of involved parties.
- This requires mutual trust; opportunistic behaviour or a lack of transparency can undermine such trust.
- Effective collaboration depends on clear governance structures, proper alignment of goals and resources, and shared expectations.
- Misaligned frameworks, poor governance, and insufficient transparency can create significant challenges in the implementation, execution, and accountability phases.

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of effective coordination, feasibility assessment, and strong governance structures in fostering successful collaborations among municipalities and cultural organizations when setting up creative HUBs of innovation. By adhering to best practices and ensuring transparency, municipalities can create a conducive environment for achieving collective goals. The recommendations and lessons learned from this study provide valuable insights for

municipalities and cultural organizations aiming to enhance their collaborative efforts and achieve sustainable outcome

**HUB-IN**



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union.

