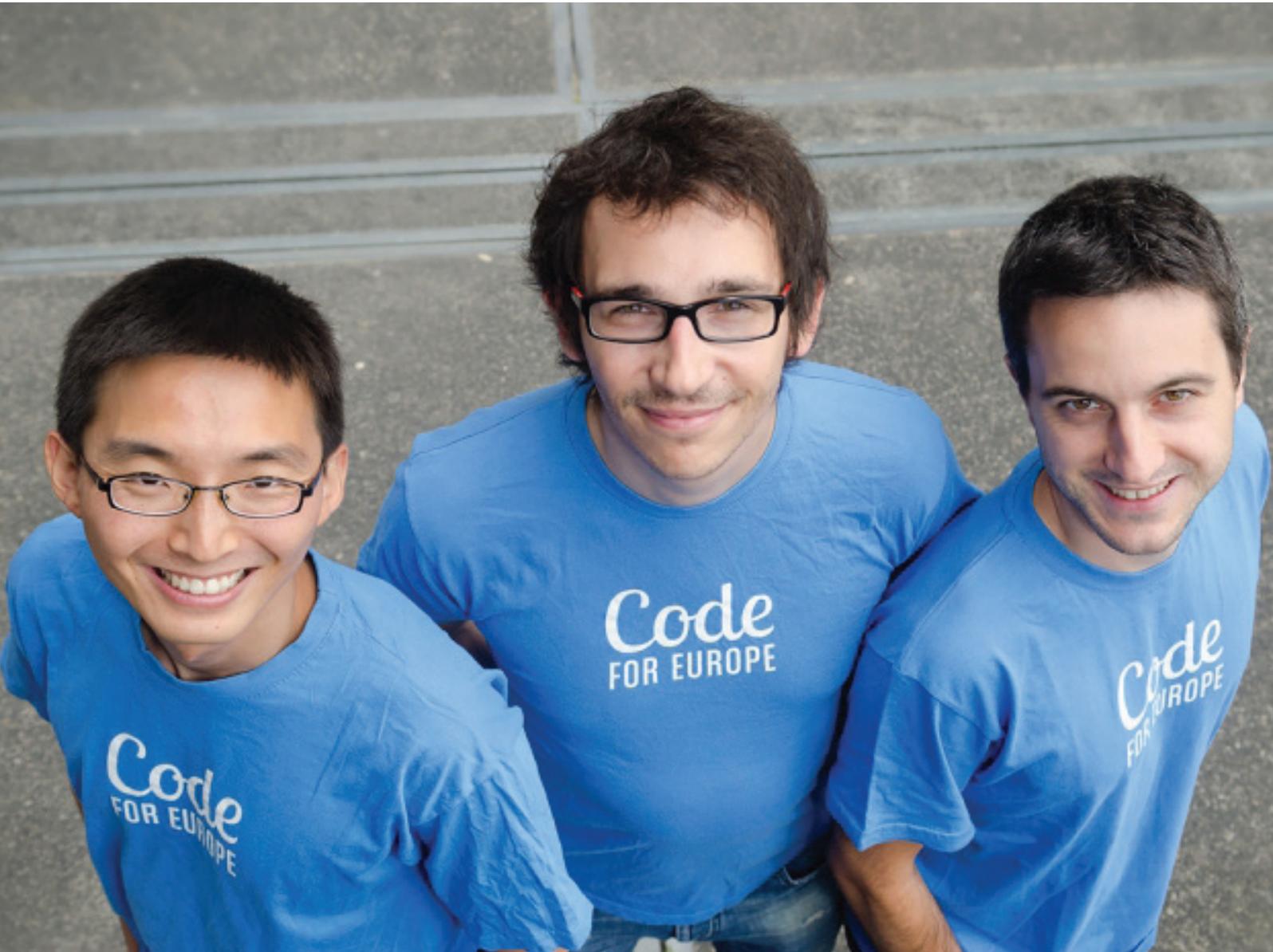




waag society



Code
FOR EUROPE

A Code for Europe Fellowship guide

Bringing civic innovation to local authorities

6 phases • 11 topics • 34 pointers

Code for Europe Fellowship

The Code for Europe program has been running since 2011. During this period, Waag Society has run two fellowships, in which temporary teams of developers worked together with civil servants on creating ICT solutions to local civic problems.

In this document we will share with you the main lesson learnt and the principles of the Code for Europe Fellowship. The document is divided into the different phases we identified based on the 2 fellowships we have run in Amsterdam in 2013 and 2014.

Learning by doing

Introduction by Suzanne Heerschop, project manager at Waag Society

Can you think of a better way of acquiring new ways of working than by old-school trial and error and by learning from experience? Without putting too much emphasis on it, this is the key principle behind the Code for Europe Fellowship program.

Code for Europe wants to solve local civic challenges by enabling agile temporary teams of developers (fellows) to create solutions that are easily re-useable in other European cities. In the process international fellows work together with civil servants. They show them that some of the issues in their municipality can actually be broken down in smaller bite-size portions that can be solved by practical IT-applications, instead of having to work on a five-year plan.

Take for example the issue of troubled neighbourhoods. It's a problem every city will recognise. Due to unemployment, poor education and bad housing situations, some neighbourhoods become unattractive or even unsafe. Municipalities can try to fix this by tackling large issues like unemployment. However, this is a very difficult task that involves many social indicators that need to be addressed simultaneously. The municipality of Amsterdam East chose, instead of only focussing on this high level, to work with Code for Europe fellows on a platform on which the community-members can book accommodations to come together. The idea behind it was simple: neighbours that know and care for each other will take more ownership of their community. This is a bottom-up way of improving the neighbourhood.

Imagine what solutions working with highly engaged developers could offer to challenges your city is facing: bicycle parking problems, closed data sets, inefficient bureaucratic processes, public transportation navigation, channelling tourism, information sharing... you name it. That's why we have created this guide for you! To understand and explore the options of a fellowship for your civic challenge.

Hopefully the following practical tips and tricks will inspire and help you to incorporate this model in your local authority. Give it a try and learn by doing and don't hesitate to contact us if you want to know more about the Code for Europe network.

Lobby phase

Engagement

General support

Get your local innovation ecosystem involved! Tech hubs, Fablabs, incubators, start-up, etc. They are the perfect support system for your developer, delivering peer-to-peer feedback. They might even be able to help with the continuation of the project/product after the fellowship. It's a win-win because for them it's interesting to take a look under the hood of the local authorities.

Inside contact

It's crucial to have an inside (wo)man in government, someone with the right contacts and who knows how the governance systems operates. Who can act as an enabler, spread the word and help lobby for resources, data sets, etc..

Visual storytelling

The easiest way to get people to lobby for you is to have presentation materials ready that city officials and other stakeholders can directly present to their colleagues and management. Nobody can resist a nice shiny visual. A picture is worth a thousand words!

CfE support

Code for Europe partners are here to help you! Materials, advise, consultancy, even international training and exchange for the fellows is part of the support you can get from CfE, so get in touch: codeforeurope.net

Embedding / ownership

Involvement

Involve the right people from the local authority in an early stage and keep them posted during the project so they feel part of it. Look for both high level policy makers - so you get the necessary validation (mandate) - as well as civil servants that are involved in the everyday civic activities.

Preparation phase

Team

Communication

Communication skills are crucial for fellows. They need to rally people, convince sceptics, talk to press, present at showcases and communicate their ideas with stakeholders. So consider this a job requirement.

Spread the word!

Involve local dev hubs/communities to spread the call for fellows. Hackathons and dev events are also an excellent place to recruit passionate developers.

Team dynamics

Be conscious of team dynamics. You are going to ask people to work in a challenging environment under pressure cooker circumstances, so it's important that there is good team play.

Support

Don't underestimate the admin involved in hiring fellows. They need a contract, a work space, CfE MoU, access to the building, post its, flip boards, etc. Make sure you have a budget allocated for these resources.

Challenge

Goal

Think of what outcome you want to aim for. If you want it to be a showcase to convince authorities to embrace ICT as a means, adapt the type of challenge accordingly.

Open mind

Choose a topic not a solution. Don't ask the developer to build you product. Instead present them with a challenge and let them investigate what type of solution fits the bill and their expertise.

Ownership

Pick a challenge owner. Make use of front runners, people that are very passionate about a topic, because they will put in the extra effort.

Scope

Rather be realistic than idealistic. You will have limited time and resources, so make sure you focus on something that is achievable. You want to create a success story out of this and, in order to do that, you need a finished (and polished) product in the end. So be clear about expectation with all parties involved.

Know your limits

Be sensitive for possible privacy or security complications. Try to avoid them as much as possible, because these are high level issues that you probably can't solve within the scope of a fellowship. Same goes for trying to integrate multiple existing systems.

Concept phase

User-centered design

Users as designers

Include your end users in this phase. Let them help shape your concept and design. Users as Designer methodology and co-creation formats can help you with this. The end-user is the citizen you want to engage with. The people from the community, as well as the contractor.

Field research

Spend time on location. Do field research for the area, people, or function you are trying to solve an issue for. You will get very practical insights as well as curious people who may become inspired to get involved because you are on the ground instead of making plans from an ivory tower.

Target

Design for you target group! This is still often underestimated. Think of choosing the right wording, step away from 'policy' language. Or consider the type of devices your target group has available, before making something flashy high tech. Always ask yourself who is going to use it and why.

Rapid prototyping

Research

Check what is already out there. Do market research to learn what works and what doesn't. Borrow where you can.

Design

It's very effective to have an UX / front end designer to help with mock-ups and wire frames. This will speed up the production, because it gives the fellows a direction.

Test it!

"Fail fast and fail often." The idea behind this is that you don't want to spend too much time analysing and documenting. Put stuff on paper, visualize it in dummy models and test it. You will get to a good concept much quicker and have more fun.

Production phase

Focus

Bit by bit

Work in iterations. Start with the most basic functionality, present it to the world, collect feedback and build on that. Allow room for alterations while you go along.

Planning

Crunch time! Choose a short time frame for development and provide the right conditions for full focus. Don't drag it on, this will kill motivation. Celebrate your success.

Call in reinforcement

Don't forget your fellows are developers. Most can be very creative on a graphical level, too, but don't expect that they can do everything. Include an artist, graphic designer, text writer, etc. to compliment the team.

Open source

Less work, greater result

Don't sweat. Do not work very hard on things that are already out there. Take advantage of open source code and solutions. The benefit of open source is that others can contribute to your code and provide solutions you might not have thought of or have time for. It also helps to keep your application up to date after the project period.

Distribution phase

Launching

Brand it!

Branding is a big part of successful distribution as well. So choose, for instance, the name of your app name well.

Share it!

Spread the joy! The higher goal is to make public service better, so when you have created a civic app, share it with the world so that other local authorities and cities can benefit from it. The Civic Exchange Platform (civicexchange.eu) is an excellent place for this.

Promotion

You want people to actually use your amazing app. Distribution starts with a good communication and marketing plan. Start to think early on about how you can best promote your app. Get relevant parties involved; e.g. city marketing department, local press, tourist offices, etc. Have a kick-off event or festival, invite early adaptors and let them create a buzz.

Ambassadorship

Share the experience

You not only created an app, but you also experienced what it is like to work with a fellowship and what challenges and solutions you encountered becoming an app publisher within a local authority. These are wonderful lessons learned, and you should be proud of them. Please share them! Go to conferences, speak on events, prepare a press kit, visualise your work in an infographic, etc. You and the team you worked with are now ambassadors.

Hosting

Apps don't grow on trees. They need a server. Think about what type and duration of hosting makes sense. Especially within local authorities this is a complex process so make sure you start early. It helps to have concrete proposals at hand.

Publishing

Licensing and publishing the app in an app store can also be a challenge. Usually there is not a fixed procedure for this within city hall, so it takes some time to get it arranged. And on top of that, getting approval from the app store can also take several weeks, so don't wait to submit until your deadline.

Maintenance phase

Continuation

Transfer

You and the fellows will go your separate ways and that's good. You do, however, want to make sure that all knowledge is transferred. Do you have all the logins, descriptions, pictures, visuals, contacts, etc.? Do you know how to operate the CMS, publishing or hosting account, etc?

Transfer

Have you given it some thought who will be managing the application from now on? Both technically as well as on content creation. The earlier you involve these people in the process, the more ownership they will feel.

Future developments

Help for further development or maintenance can come from the support network you have been building during the fellowship. Perhaps a community member is code savvy enough to fix an occasional issue. Or a local start-up is willing to lend a hand.

Store it!

A good place to store the source code is Github. Then you have it stored somewhere where it is easily accessible, also to others that want to borrow your work, or want to continue develop your application further.

Code for Europe in practice

The results in Amsterdam

For the Amsterdam civil servants that have hosted a fellow, the opportunity to work with the fellows, as well as the inhabitants of their respective municipalities created an experience that influenced the way these civil servants perform their day-to-day job.

“It’s a learning process on how the city actually works and we want to embrace new ideas from developers” (Elvria Osmanovic, policy maker Amsterdam South)

“...as an ICT specialist at the local government I’m mostly occupied with managing the internal systems. The Code for Europe project helped me to understand how it’s actually being used by citizens” (Rene de Jong, policy maker Amsterdam West)

“I believe in the concept of Code for Europe, I think IT can broad our scope to find solutions for social issues” (Anne-Jan Zieleman, policy maker Amsterdam East)

Get started with Code for Europe

Join the network!

Are you intrigued to learn more about implementing a Code for Europe Fellowship in your own local authority? Please feel free to contact us for more information, support or workshops.

The Code for Europe network exists out of local partners that can facilitate a wide variety of support to local authorities. From recruiting the right fellows, to coaching the whole fellowship on location.

Contact us

For the Netherlands this local Partner is Waag Society. Please contact us at society@waag.org

For contacting the Code for Europe overall network, or Partners in other countries, please check out www.codeforeurope.net or mail us at info@codeforeurope.net

Looking for previously developed civic application that your city might benefit from? Have a look at www.civicexchange.eu

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