

Handbook for Public-Civic Collaboration

*Designing strong
collaborations between
citizen initiatives and
governments*

English summary



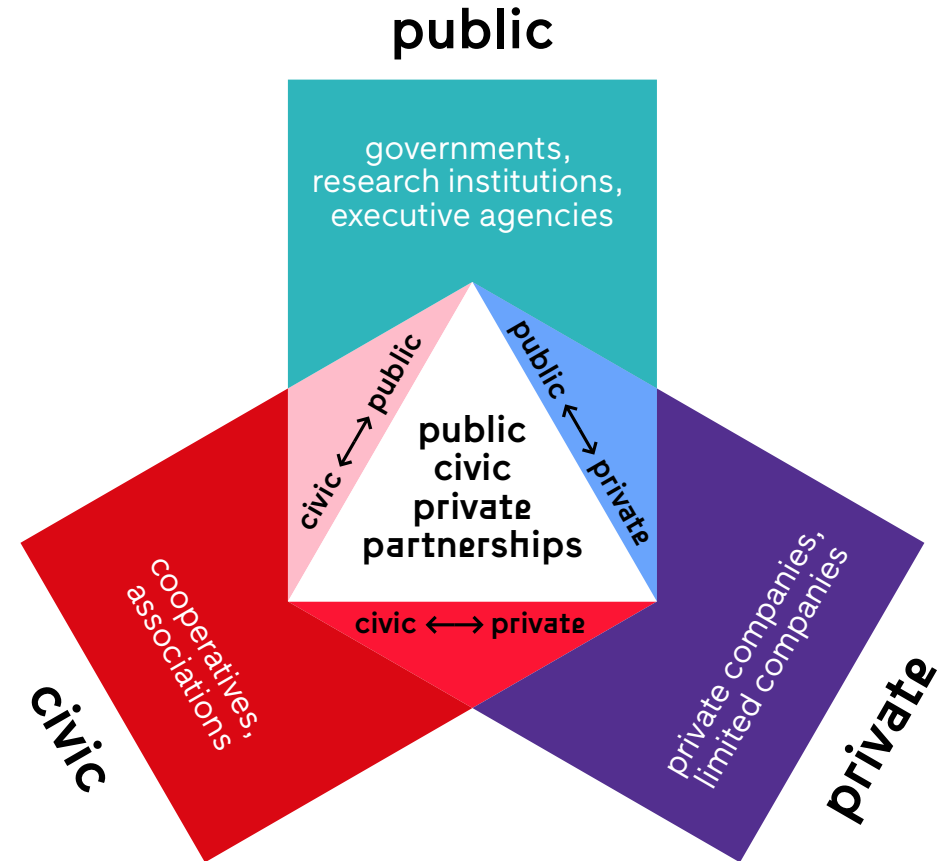
The need for public-civic collaboration

Societal transitions deeply affect our daily lives and the way society functions because they require changes in policy, culture, institutions, behaviour and technology. All layers of society, from individuals and communities to businesses and governments, must be involved.

In recent decades, governments on all levels have mostly collaborated with private parties, outsourcing much to the market. These public-private partnerships have not resulted in public engagement and widespread prosperity. To change this, there is a current need to put public interest before commercial interest.

Civic initiatives have proven to be valuable and serious alternatives alongside private and public parties when working on societal transitions.

But the current rules of our administrative, legal and economic systems are set up for public-private partnerships. As a result, civic parties are often sidelined. By explicitly creating public-civic collaborations in the coming decades, a level playing field is built that also leaves room for the strength of civic organisations. To achieve this, we must continue to study, (re)design and develop collaborations between government and civic organisations and initiatives. To this effort, the Public-Civic Handbook aims to make a contribution.



Who is this handbook for?

During 2022 and 2023 Waag Futurelab and Stby, both based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, have collaborated on a joint research project with the question: What do citizen initiatives and governments need, to achieve sustainable collaborations that create mutual value? Our goal was to learn from experimenting with new types of collaborations between governments and civic organisations.

The 1.5 year research project resulted in a set of key lessons and a selection of 15 collaboration tools, presented in a handbook for public-civic collaboration. The handbook was created by Stby and Waag FutureLab, especially for people and organisations who are seeking inspiring ways to improve public-civic partnerships.

In this brief English summary you can read what kind of lessons we learned and see an overview of 15 tools you can experiment with to create better collaborations. The full handbook is only available in Dutch, via this link:

https://waag.org/sites/waag/files/2024-02/Handboek_Publiek-Civiele_Samenwerking.pdf



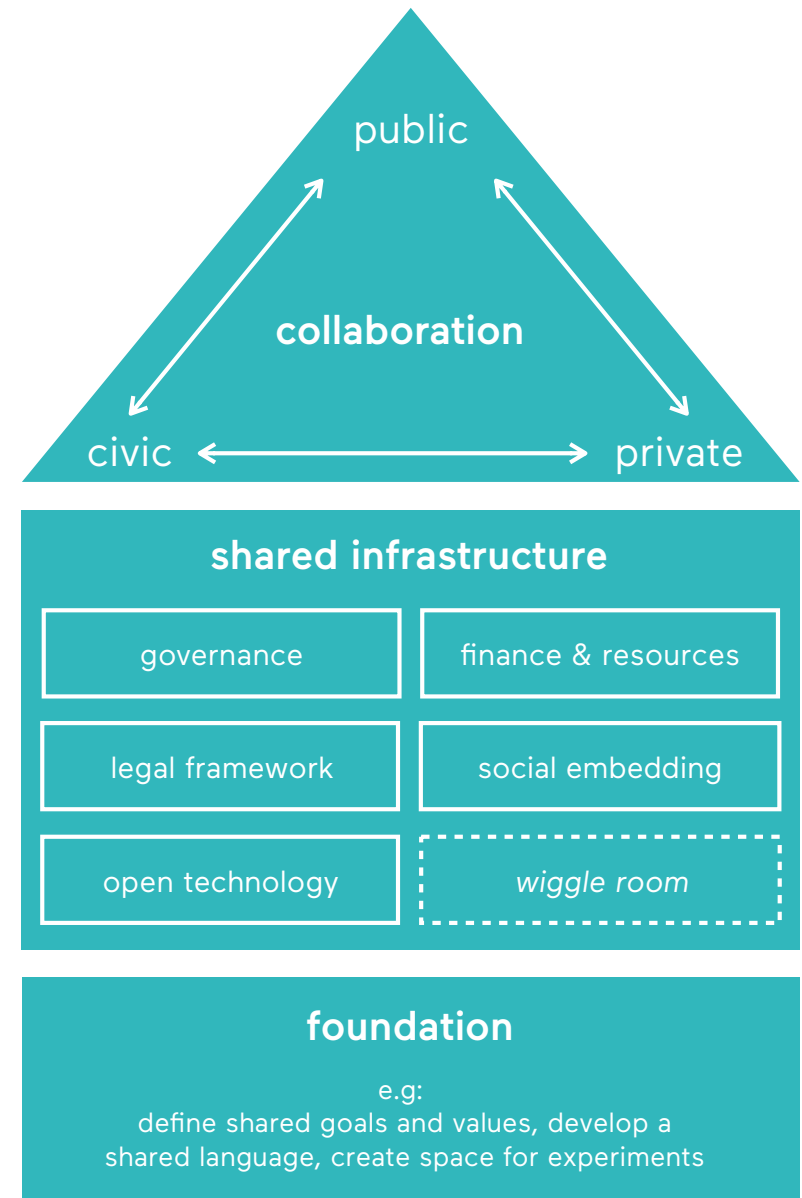
A knowledge base for public-civic collaboration

Building public-civic collaboration

Building collaboration can be thought of as building a house: a strong foundation is needed to support the walls and the roof. A good collaboration is also built on a strong foundation, that the collaborating parties use to shape their joint infrastructure.

Many public-civic partnerships, similar to public-private partnerships, are based on control and mistrust. This manifests itself, for example, in accountability processes that produce more paperwork than results.

To achieve constructive, sustainable cooperation and generate mutual value for governments and civic initiatives, it is necessary to break down old structures and build a new joint infrastructure.



What do you need for a good collaboration?

The foundation

Sustainable collaboration requires a foundation based on trust and reciprocity. Jointly establishing values and goals and developing a shared language help create a culture of trust. This creates space for a designing attitude and to experiment with each other. Working together on these conditions creates a relationship that allows for designing of the beaten path in a way that suits both government and social initiative.

The infrastructure

Once the foundation is in place, a joint infrastructure can be established or strengthened. These are the walls. This infrastructure consists of a number of conditions that must be fulfilled jointly by the parties. This involves making agreements about governance, finances and resources, legal frameworks, social embedding and open technology. In making these agreements, it is important to look for space between the rules: solutions outside the beaten path that work for both government and social initiative.

The roof

With a shared foundation and infrastructure, the public-civic collaboration is well supported. Three elements are crucial to the collaboration itself:

Attitude

Being open to other perspectives, patience, guts, designing attitude, long-term orientation, daring to let go and trust the other, questioning assumptions.

Skills

Ability to reflect and adapt, recognize points of contact for cooperation, look at cooperation relationally (not transactionally), be able to switch between formal and informal contexts, think and act in a multidisciplinary way, deal with uncertainty.

Knowledge

Knowledge of the neighbourhood such as local social structures, the forms of communication in the neighbourhood and connecting to them, knowledge of government systems: where is the space between the rules?



Getting started with public-civic collaboration

Tools for public-civic collaborations

The second half of the handbook offers practical tools to strengthen or renew public-civic collaboration. Where the first half of the handbook provides a range of lessons to learn from years of experience and practical cases studied in our research, the second part is about doing.

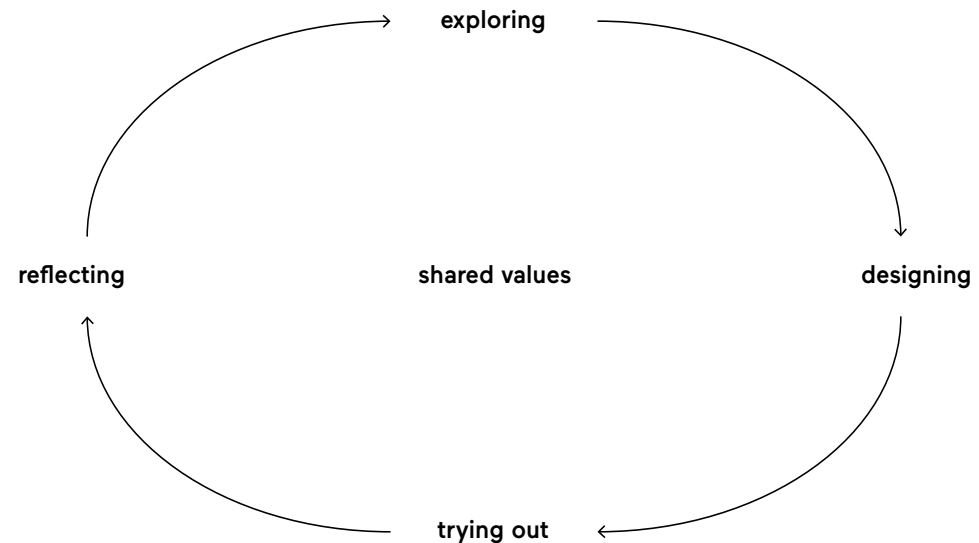
How to build the foundation of shared values, goals and language? How to create a safe space and culture of trust that is essential for doing collaborative experiments with confidence?

The tools in the handbook support both creating a solid foundation for collaboration, and making and holding space for experimenting with collaborations.

The approach and tools of the handbook take inspiration from the deep knowledge base of Frame Innovation, developed by Kees Dorst. Frame Innovation is essentially an approach to looking at complex issues from new perspectives, in order to come up with new solutions.

Appreciative Inquiry

Creating space for experimentation requires a clear learning and doing process for all involved. The Appreciative Inquiry approach is well suited for this because it offers a flexible and recognizable dynamic: a four-stage cyclic model around shared values in collaboration.



On the next page is an overview of tools included in the handbook. What do you want to get started with? Finish the sentence that starts with 'We want...'

we want to...

... strengthen our foundations
by...

...mapping out everyone involved

Tool 1 Stakeholdermap

...understanding how the collaboration came about

Tool 2 Timeline Collaboration

...evaluating what works (not) well in the collaboration

Tool 3 Keep/ Stop/Start Doing

...mapping what values we share

Tool 4 Values map

...determining what values are most important to us

Tool 5 Values Pyramid

... explore possibilities for
by...

...learning about other ways of collaborating

Tool 6 Dot on the Horizon

...finding out what we hope and fear for

Tool 7 Hopes and Fears

...exploring different possible futures

Tool 8 Future Headlines

... design concepts
by...

...finding out what and who we (still) need for success

Tool 9 Missing Perspectives

...gaining inspiration from other collaborations

Tool 10 Other Contexts

... try out ideas
by...

...experimenting with a new approach

Tool 11 Values and Approach

...making choices about the nature of our collaboration

Tool 12 Mutual Relationships

...capturing people's responses to experiments

Tool 13 Experiments Journal

... reflect and learn
through...

...taking stock of our collaboration

Tool 14 Value Pursuit

...reflecting together on our experiments and experiences

Tool 15 Journal Reflection

Colophon

The Handbook for Public-Civic Collaboration resulted from a collaboration between Waag Futurelab and Stby. The purpose of the project was to explore what civic initiatives and governments need in order to build sustainable collaborations.



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Waag Futurelab is an Amsterdam-based creative research institution, contributing to the research, design and development of a sustainable, equitable society.



Stby is a creative research consultancy based in London and Amsterdam that contributes to meaningful, positive change by pioneering in the ever-evolving field of design research.

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