

# Toolkit for local governments and community led-initiatives:

## Collaborative governance for just sustainability transitions



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This toolkit synthesises knowledge on collaborative governance for just sustainability transitions from a variety of sources, primarily: insights gathered at the training on Empowering Local Governance for Just Sustainable Transition (30.9-3.10.2024) through the Communities for Local Green Deals project, as well as a selection of resources from ICLEI Europe's Justice, Equity and Democracy team.

It is composed of two parts:

**PART ONE** poses and answers key questions around governing collaborative, participatory sustainability transitions. It is directed at local government staff.

**PART TWO** features an ICLEI-authored booklet specifically on local government and community-led initiative collaboration. It also incorporates insights from the aforementioned Local Governance Training.

**The Communities for Local Green Deals – COM4LGD** project recognizes the intersection of the climate and environmental crisis with the social and political polarisation that EU citizens are currently faced with. The innovative solution we propose for a sustainable, just, democratic and inclusive future for the EU is a focus on local community development, climate and sustainability action, community organising, advocacy, and cooperation between citizens and local governments covering all 27 member states.

## **PART ONE**

### **Key questions around governing collaborative, participatory sustainability transitions. Directed at local government staff.**

- 1 - How do we define justice in sustainability transitions and why is it crucial?
- 2 - How can local governments define and address (vulnerable) target groups for sustainability actions?
- 3 - What are concrete participation formats and how do we choose the right one?
- 4 - How to facilitate participatory processes? (Plan, implement, and run)
- 5 - How to handle conflict while conducting a participatory processes?
- 6 - How to promote longevity and social sustainability of co-creation processes, and how to follow through on their results?

## 1 - How do we define justice in sustainability transitions and why is it crucial?

To successfully transition to low-carbon, livable cities, environmental sustainability and social justice must be seen as inseparable. Urban sustainability efforts that overlook social justice risk worsening existing, and creating new inequalities, resulting in an unfair distribution of both the benefits and burdens of sustainable development across urban communities. A just approach to urban sustainability transitions ensures distributional, procedural and recognition justice. When communities see how sustainability initiatives increase quality of life for all, they are more likely to stand behind them and not in opposition.

**Distributional justice:** equally spreading the costs, responsibilities and benefits across society

**Procedural justice:** inclusive access to decision-making processes

**Recognition justice:** recognition of everyone's unique lifeways, cultures, values and equal dignity.

You can read more about these terms and the evolution of the urban just transition concept in this [guidance document](#). Meanwhile, this [Handbook for Sustainable and Just Cities](#) compiles cross thematic elements to support the integration of social justice in urban environmental sustainability along with guiding questions and ideas to apply learnings in practice.

In essence, effective engagement and empowerment of various urban communities starts by putting care at the centre of sustainability efforts.



## 2 - How can local governments define and address (vulnerable) target groups for sustainability actions?

Socially just climate measures seek to provide targeted support to those who are either most affected by the negative impacts of climate change or face the greatest challenges in implementing climate-friendly measures and extend access to groups beyond the usual suspects. The specific aim is to ensure that:

- I. the diverse lived realities, needs, and financial, linguistic or physical abilities of all local residents and communities are recognized and addressed; and
- II. (If relevant) public climate funds are distributed equitably across all population groups.

This *Climate Equity Toolbox: A how-to guide for making municipal subsidy programs more socially just* (forthcoming) offers useful insights, summarised below, on identifying and addressing target groups for socially just urban climate actions.

### *Identifying the target group*

Determining which groups can be supported and in how far the support can be targeted to specific needs requires the availability of demographic data. This work therefore benefits from close collaboration with other municipal departments such as the housing department or social services.

Possible target groups for equitable climate actions might include:

- Low-income households;
- Residents of disadvantaged districts or neighbourhoods;
- Tenants;
- Families and single parents;
- People experiencing exclusion from language barriers/cultural background;
- Senior citizens; and
- People with disabilities or limited mobility.

To increase the affordability of climate measures and enable cost benefits from using energy efficient solutions, a common approach is to provide support to households living on **low incomes**, typically defined by a specific income threshold, or those participating in particular government-funded welfare programs (e.g. housing benefits, food programs or student loans). Depending on geographical conditions, subsidy programs can also focus on urban areas with a high concentration of **social housing** and/or neighbourhoods with a high share of low-income communities, often identified by postal code or district boundaries. Different forms of housing tenure, such as homeownership or renting, can also guide the allocation of support to ensure municipal subsidies are fairly distributed.

**Families or single parents**, due to their increased financial burdens and socio-political significance, may also be prioritised for specific subsidies - for example cargo bikes. Additionally, **specific target groups** such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities are statistically more likely to struggle with energy poverty and in some cases are the first to be impacted by the negative effects of climate change, so additional support could be channelled in their direction<sup>1</sup>. Lastly, city-specific demographics may also highlight other groups such as refugees, people with migratory backgrounds, and Indigenous communities to be disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion. One should recognise the intersectionality<sup>2</sup> of these lived experiences and interconnected nature of various socio-economic factors. Therefore programs should ideally be tailored to address multiple, intersecting disadvantages faced by individuals and communities in each city.

Building on previously defined target groups, structural barriers and target group needs with respect to access and personal participation should be closely investigated. These might include:

- Inadequate digital and physical infrastructure or lack of access to public services (e.g. the unavailability of a printing service or computer or limited or

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<sup>1</sup> Gu (2023); Robinson (2019).

<sup>2</sup> For a more comprehensive insight into the term and the current research landscape visit the blogpost [What does gender+ mean?](#) by the acting project.

not wheelchair/stroller accessible transport or buildings to reach service providers);

- An increased burden of complicated administrative and bureaucratic processes (exacerbated by educational or language barriers);
- The challenge to provide up-front payments (even where later reimbursed) and uncertainty regarding a deduction from other social welfare payments;
- A lack of exposure and technical knowledge of the particular climate action ; and
- A lack of awareness that the particular climate action even exists at all.

While these challenges might not affect the overall launch of a program, they can result in low participation of such structurally disadvantaged groups. If funds are rapidly depleted without reaching the intended audience, the social justice objectives may become ineffective, leading to failure in achieving the desired impact. To prevent this, it is crucial to engage target groups systematically and with an open approach to outcomes already in the project outline phase.

*Actively engaging the target group in planning*

**“Meet them where they are”**

There is a diversity of communities that can benefit from targeted support and attention to their unique needs and challenges. To design programs that effectively respond to these challenges, it is essential to create a safe and accessible space where community members can openly share their needs, hopes, fears, and emotions, and freely express their concerns and feedback. Engaging with communities in different formats (digital, analogue, face to face) during the program outline phase and beyond ensures that a variety of community members is able to participate and express themselves.

*Image 1 - Recommendation from the [Climate Equity Toolbox](#)*

Reaching disinterested and/or vulnerable groups requires framing activities in a way that matters to people’s lived realities. Not everyone has the luxury or interest to make decisions based on climate change narratives. First, taking time to listen to local needs and weave informal connections within communities helps understand

people's motivations and design sustainability initiatives that allow community members to empower each other. Think about the big questions: What are people's needs? What is their state of mind? What are structural conditions that may hinder or boost certain groups' ability or willingness to take part? What human and social resources already exist, including already active community initiatives?

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, such as surveys and interviews, focus groups (moderated discussion rounds) or even co-design workshops<sup>3</sup> can build understanding of these questions.

**It takes time and commitment to build trust with target groups** and ensure their participation in engagement activities. Consulting and collaborating with well-known and respected community members is an effective way to gain feedback and ideas during the early stages of program development. Such “multipliers” can be helpful to gain trust in the community, identify appropriate channels of communication, and establish long-term networks, especially where individuals and groups have been exposed to experiences of isolation and social exclusion. Tapping into this sense of community is a very important factor for engaging residents, since the combination of individual resources and social dynamics are key enablers of behavioural change. Notably, community groups can be a good link to more vulnerable populations. They can reduce tension by acting as a more neutral third party with a better chance of accessing people who are otherwise hesitant to engage with the government (e.g. undocumented individuals, those previously living in authoritarian regimes). Openly communicating the goals and results of consulting the target group in funding programs is crucial to manage expectations. Honesty is key for building trust. This can set the future course of collaborative practices in the city beyond the specific just climate action program.

The willingness for **collaborative design** and the **establishment of long-term connections and networks** are already the first steps towards ensuring that disadvantaged groups are included in municipal programs and projects. The active involvement of the target group therefore goes beyond informing about measures and selective consultation meetings and relies on long-term partnerships, ongoing

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2022).

dialogue, iterative processes and shared decision making between communities and the city.

### *Engagement of the group during the action implementation*

There are various potential formats to engage and communicate with the target group at different scales. Experimenting with and offering communities a variety of options to work with the city, to take initiative and provide feedback can improve the program and lead to long-term engagement. You can encourage longer term ownership by showing clear recognition for good citizen actions, making wins visible, and **providing space and responsibility**. When given access to caring political actors such as yourself, and some financial or physical resources, people are much more likely to take an active part in urban sustainability transitions. One way to give responsibility is by providing a framework for proposed activities, but asking communities to fill in the content. Effective engagement can also strengthen the awareness of a city's overarching climate goals and the relevance for targeted subsidy programs, thereby helping to build momentum for other socially equitable climate actions in the future.

Other resources, like this [EURESFO24 report](#), mirror the recommendations in this section for engagement of vulnerable groups in climate action planning and implementation. The EURESFO report synthesises outcomes from various just transition projects and reaffirms the importance of: recognizing the multidimensional character of vulnerability, working with intermediaries and cultural mediators, building trust, building municipal capacity for this work, and reframing group identities **from “vulnerable” to “valuable” people**.

### 3 - What are concrete participation formats and how do we choose the right one?

Genuine participation prioritises inclusivity and diverse perspectives to shape urban sustainability and justice in practice, not just in theory. This means that participants' contributions tangibly influence the outcomes of initiatives, actively impacting the current landscape of urban sustainability and justice. In the beginning, it is essential to plan for flexibility, since it is required to have true impact according to shifting local developments. While this may entail a less pre-planned structure, have trust in the process of making your city sustainable together, which should be built around constructive stories of change.

In choosing a participation format, a fundamental consideration is the level of engagement and power sharing. The graphic below sorts a number of concrete formats building on Arnstein's **ladder of citizen participation**: First, citizens can be provided with (targeted) information about decisions that have already been taken, and be motivated to take part in existing programs and activities. Secondly, citizens can be consulted on their opinions or feedback on specific issues or policies, thus providing information to be taken into account in decision-making. Thirdly, decisions can be made through processes of collaboration in multi-stakeholder partnerships, e.g. through co-creation. And finally, the power of decision-making can be shared or delegated to citizen groups. If true democratic engagement is the goal, it is important to move towards higher levels of citizen power, e.g. co-creation and co-decision making. However, this might not always be desirable, depending on the objective of participation and potential structural constraints, e.g. in terms of resources or legal frameworks. In this case, it is crucial to carefully manage expectations, define a clear mandate and communicate the (non-)outcomes transparently to avoid disengagement and erosion of trust.

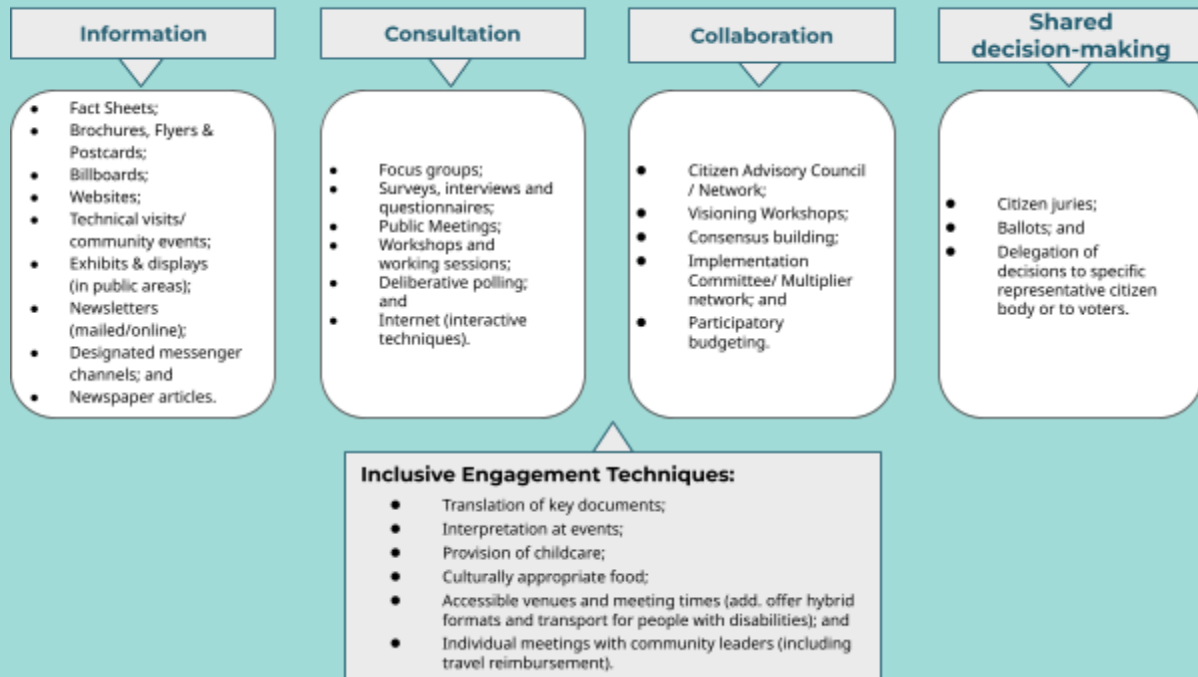


Image 2 - Participation formats clustered according to different levels, from the [Climate Equity Toolbox](#)

There are many inspirational participation formats that cities are already putting into practice.

Examples of participation formats in practice can also be found in this [Booklet of Governance Arrangements for Sustainable Just Cities](#), which dives deeper into six governance themes that are useful to consider while designing and implementing urban sustainability initiatives. E.g. [Barcelona's digital platform](#) for dialogue between policy makers and residents, [Freiburg's Migrant innenbeirat \(Migrant Council\)](#) for raising interests of immigrant residents in the city council, and [Ireland's Public Participation Networks](#) for bringing together different community groups in each local authority area and give them better access to influence local decision making. Further examples and case studies can be found on [Participedia.net](#), the [Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies](#) or on [citizen-engagement.eu](#).



The [Toolbox of Experimental Participatory Methods](#) nicely categorises some formats and gives further explanation and examples of each method.

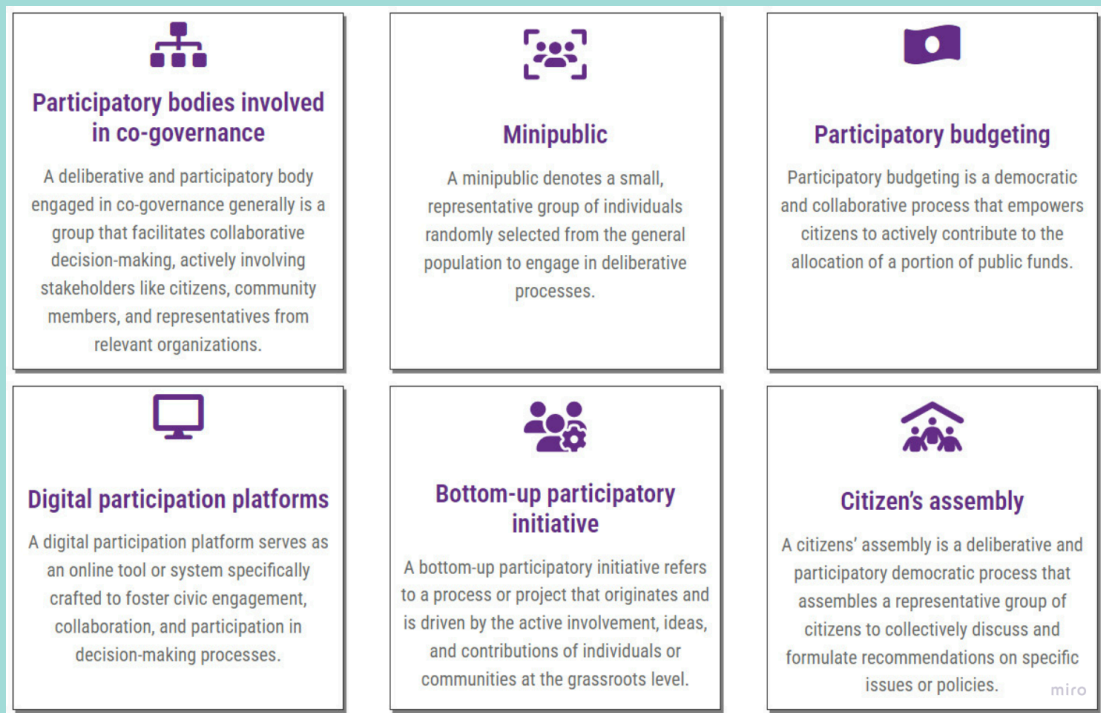


Image 3 - Some types of participation formats, from the [Toolbox of Experimental Participatory Methods](#)

For a more holistic approach to participatory local transformation processes, the [Local Transformation Toolkit](#) offers a set of steps for communities to implement actions using a set of methods, tools and principles.

Starting public engagement is not easy, but **grabbing the lowest hanging fruit first is a good start**. Even talking to a few people is better than none. Lack of facilitation and co-creation know-how within city administrations is a challenge. To prepare for engagement processes, consider **boosting skills** through trainings, being brave enough to think outside the box and be creative, and even bringing in external facilitation support where possible.



## 4 - How to *facilitate* participatory processes? (*Plan, implement, and run*)

*The Power of Many: How city officials can use co-creation for Just and Sustainable Cities* publication includes practical guides on organising and facilitating participatory processes (i.e. both preparation and implementation stages), summarised below.

### *Suggested structure of a co-creation process*

Create an overarching vision with a well-framed challenge that speaks to participants and lay people. Decide how the different co-creation events should develop. The 4-event co-creation format is one option:

- I. **Onboarding** – getting people to know each other; in particular, breaking down barriers across sectors; identifying the problem and formulating a common understanding thereof, exploring and informing stakeholders about the benefits of participating and cooperating on actions and solutions.
- II. **Learning** – facilitating knowledge exchange between citizens to be part of the solution. If new actors with other knowledge and experience are needed, this is the moment to invite them. At this stage, new tools, perspectives, trainings, competences or any type of support can be given to the participants.
- III. **Developing** – working together on shaping common solutions. This could be anything from idea generation, to testing an idea on the ground, to weighing the pros and cons of different scenarios - considering barriers, feasibility, and opportunities. The focus is placed on trying and testing as many solutions as possible.
- IV. **Action** – This could be a formal/informal agreement, a decision, a pilot test, a model for collaboration across-sectors.

### *Helpful (specific) tools for planning events*

**Programme:** Start with a draft event programme by mixing and matching the elements below (discussed in depth with examples in the Power of Many publication).

Informing – getting everybody on the same page

Breaking the ice – team building

Learning

Engaging – working together on something

Rewarding – expressing thanks for participating

Wrapping up – thanking and informing again

**Run sheet:** Develop a run sheet to focus on the elaboration of each event. Examples and further guidance on how to do this are provided in the Power of Many publication.

### *How to facilitate dialogues and knowledge exchange*

As detailed in the Power of Many publication, a good co-creation host should:

**Welcome** participants. Welcoming starts before the process officially starts.

**Sense the room** and listen. Make people feel truly heard and understood.

**Ask questions** to facilitate better dialogue. A well-placed question can lead to better understanding and addressing a complex problem.

Use the necessary **Voice & body language**. During a facilitation process there will be many occasions when you are required to raise the tone of your voice. For example, to ask people to be quiet, or to bring attention to a specific problem, to highlight an aspect of a discussion, etc.; and

**Manage friction** if it arises (see *How to Handle Conflict* section, below), practising nonviolent communication as a means to avoid dispute and ensure consensus

## 5 - How to handle conflict while conducting a participatory processes?

*The Power of Many: How city officials can use co-creation for Just and Sustainable Cities* publication lays out a step-by-step way to respond to friction in a participatory event:

- I. **Acknowledgement** – It takes courage to speak up in front of many people. Thank them for their comment, and avoid the words YOU (direct attack to the person and the group) and BUT.
- II. **Reposition** – Repeat out loud what the person has said, but reframe it positively. Focus on the needs of the person. What are they actually saying? What are they actually frustrated about?
- III. **Invitation and co-creation** – Offer the opportunity to be part of shaping the programme ahead. Offer other people in the room to also join the conversation. Call a break first, if needed. Replace one of the sessions to make sure this need is included.

**Principles of Nonviolent Communication** can help put forward positions without dissolving into arguments. You can convey what you need while building trust and empathy using the following steps:

- I. **Observations.** This is what I (objectively) observe.
- II. **Feelings.** The other person can't read your mind, so you need to be clear about how this situation makes you feel.
- III. **Needs.** Next, you need to present your actual needs. As the problem starts with an unmet need, this is an element that needs to be conveyed well.
- IV. **Requests.** Then you have to request what you want for your needs to be met. Even if the other person is not obliged to fulfil your request, stating your feelings and needs is already a step forward towards building empathy and a relationship of trust.

## 6 - How to promote longevity and social sustainability of co-creation processes, and how to follow through on their results?

Too often, the task of facilitating co-creation processes and engagement with urban communities falls on top of a long list of other priorities. Frequently, community work, which ensures that a broad variety of voices are included in city-making, is an unpaid effort. On top of this, the dominance of project-based work truncates progress in building relationships and trust between communities and the city administration.

Whenever possible, community engagement should be made into a **properly resourced job**, rather than a series of one-off projects. Appointing an accessible contact person in your local government to liaise with communities will boost relations (e.g. “Agenda 21 Office” Oberhausen (De,<https://bit.ly/3BIBIfm>). When this is not possible, you can also promote a longer-term engagement perspective by keeping your eye on broader transformation paths, rather than isolated projects. Try to **counter project-based work** by using projects as a way to contribute to continuous change processes. For example, co-created non-binding documents like manifestos are a good way to compile locals’ views and generate momentum for future follow-up action beyond a specific project lifetime.

It helps to **be a good storyteller** in order to communicate the overall value of what you are doing and overcome any internal resistance as well. Much of this work cannot be measured in a spreadsheet, so stories are one compelling way to show the impact of community engagement.

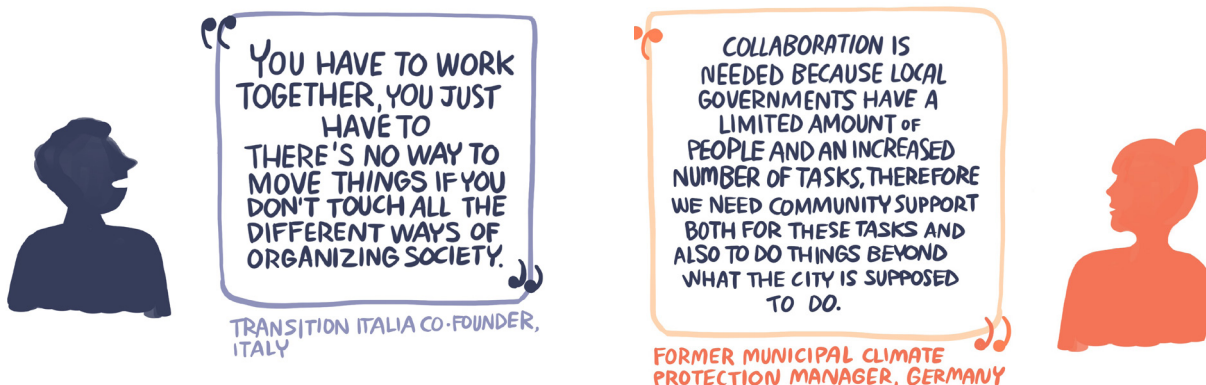
Finally, *The Power of Many: How city officials can use co-creation for Just and Sustainable Cities* publication discusses the importance of finding resources to implement plans decided on in co-creation processes and offers preliminary thoughts on how to encourage private sector investment in public plans, possibilities for members of the public to invest resources other than money, and beyond.

## PART TWO

Features a booklet specifically on local government and community-led initiative collaboration. It also incorporates insights from the COM4LGD Local Governance Training and was produced in synergy with the UrbanCommunity initiative.

# WHY IS COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES IMPORTANT FOR SUSTAINABLE AND JUST CITIES?

Collaboration between local governments and CLIs is often a necessity. For example, imagine you are a CLI which needs to carry out activities on municipal property, or a capacity-crunched local government staff relying on community support for your increasing task load.



Collaboration is not only a necessity. It also makes cities more socially equitable, and urban governance more democratic. It enables long-term, mutually-beneficial and out-of-the-box change towards sustainable and just cities by:

## PROMOTING WIN-WIN SITUATIONS

Both groups stand to gain when CLIs and local governments see their roles as complementary. CLIs offer grassroots knowledge, innovation, and a better chance of local buy-in through their networks. Since they operate outside bureaucracy, CLIs can be more radical and constructively push local governments to think and act differently. Meanwhile, local governments have convening power to facilitate partnerships, physical spaces, and often financial resources to offer. As active collaborators, local governments can assist with some project management tasks and help initiatives mature. When local governments engage openly with CLIs, they sow seeds of enthusiastic and rewarding local engagement.



## REINVIGORATING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Collaboration increases civic engagement, accountability, and transparency, while also promoting collective values. Genuine engagement with CLIs may strengthen public faith in local government's power to positively address real-life local priorities. Meeting face-to-face helps humanise each other and recognise the unique constraints each group faces. Trust, the combination of empathy and consistency, is built as people in government and the community develop personal relations and create a positive common narrative of change together. Ideally, these relationships don't only stay with individuals, but also help build long-lasting systems and rules of collaboration.

## REACHING MORE PEOPLE

Specific groups of people, usually those facing economic or social vulnerability, are underrepresented in decision-making which affects them. Tokenistic participation in the past, a lack of time, and possibly even general distrust means that these groups are less able or willing to take part in local governments' efforts to engage them. Cities will not become more sustainable and equitable if only the privileged few are a part of the process. Justice-oriented CLIs elevate these hidden voices. Their accessible nature and local networks makes them adept at connecting with a wider array of people so that everyone can enjoy and contribute to their cities.



## ENCOURAGING LONG-TERM CONSISTENCY

Collaboration makes progress towards sustainable and just cities more consistent, evening out bumps and lulls in motivation or capacity. Long-term thinking and planning sprouts from needs-based community efforts, contributing to continuity across election cycles. Over time, acting together strengthens ties and sets a good example, inspiring change in other places.



# WHAT CHALLENGES EXIST FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES ?

Often, collaboration is not a desired or possible path: for example when a CLI wishes to act as an oppositional force from 'outside' the system, or when either actor does not uphold values of sustainability and justice nor act in interest of the common good.

The likelihood and nature of collaboration also depends on factors like political context and city size. Partnerships between progressive CLIs and local governments are less likely under the rule of a watchful authoritarian national government, for instance. Many lessons from this booklet come from Western Europe, which largely enjoys democratic norms. There are also differences to consider between big and small municipalities. While CLIs and local government staff in big cities might have a harder time building personal relationships, they likely have better access to various resources than those in smaller municipalities. Smaller municipalities, in turn, may have fewer resources, but more personal connections between municipal staff and local CLIs.



“ IT WAS EYE-OPENING TO LEARN THAT THE TEMPORARY USE OF A FEW PARKING LOTS IN BUDAPEST FOR A HEAT ADAPTATION EXPERIMENT WAS ULTIMATELY DENIED. FOR OUR COMMUNITY'S LIVING STREETS INITIATIVE, WE ARE ALLOWED TO BLOCK AN ENTIRE STREET FOR TWO TO THREE MONTHS. ”

MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT MANAGER, BELGIUM

Challenges for collaboration usually stem from a *lack of something*. This can be a lack of shared interests, trust, time, representation, money, skills, imagination, transparency and political will. CLIs and local governments specifically point out:



## INCOMPATIBLE VISIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

When local governments and CLIs have very different visions for the future of their city or town, this opens space for conflict - an integral but challenging part of any political process. Strong lack of common understanding over issues, or vastly different issue prioritisation, makes collaboration difficult. Varying motivations, like re-election, also influence if or how collaboration happens.

## DIFFERENT OPERATING MODES

CLIs and local governments operate with different scopes, speeds, levels of flexibility, types of language and interconnectedness. Change-making is usually slower in local governments than in CLIs, since public authorities must follow more rules and predefined procedures. Consequently, CLIs feel that bureaucracy, its accompanying jargon and inflexibility decreases accessibility and increases frustration - especially if paired with poor digitalisation. Meanwhile, with the rise of project management working styles, city staff feel pressured to deliver results on deadlines, which conflicts with the long-term and uncertain nature of relationship and trust building with CLIs. Lack of long-term engagement ensues when local government-CLI relationships depend on one-off projects and on certain individuals rather than being systemically embedded in governance structures. Lastly, local governments tend to work in departmental silos, whereas CLIs tend to have a more holistic focus, which can make collaboration more complicated.



“ THE CLIMATE DEPARTMENT SUPPORTED MY CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP PLAN, BUT JUST BEFORE IT WAS MEANT TO HAPPEN, OTHER DEPARTMENTS CAME FORWARD SAYING IT WASN'T POSSIBLE. THE CLIMATE DEPARTMENT WAS POWERLESS, IT'S PRETTY SYMBOLIC. ”

URBAN HEAT ISLAND SOCIAL INNOVATOR, HUNGARY

## UNEVEN POWER DYNAMIC

As explained by many CLIs, it cannot be ignored that their local government holds more power in most situations. Some local government officials are seen as having an immediate 'why can I reject' mindset instead of one that is open to collaboration. Even when a co-creative process happens, the final decision usually rests with the local government, which can be adversarial.

## EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

Another collaboration challenge requires us to zoom out beyond city limits. External regulatory and financial support for equitable climate action falls short for both local governments and CLIs. Local governments emphasise that a lack of funding from national governments leaves them with only the capacity to carry on 'business-as-usual', while grappling with many issues pushed down from other levels of government. They further indicate that political power depends on where the topic rests - it could be under the province or state's control, which could have conflicting priorities. Some barriers at the national level can hamper action and collaboration by, e.g. blocking informal CLIs from receiving funding. When CLIs are not aware of these external barriers faced by local governments, it can lead to lower levels of trust. Overall, this unsupportive environment partially contributes to insufficient systematic processes and spaces for local government-CLI collaboration.

## OTHER DIFFICULTIES LINKED TO MARGINALISATION AND INEQUALITY



“WE TRIED TO GET PEOPLE INVOLVED,  
BUT SOMETIMES IT JUST DOESN'T WORK.”

FORMER MUNICIPAL CLIMATE PROTECTION MANAGER, GERMANY

Many communities are disengaged for various reasons. Wealthier people with more time and resources to spare are more likely to be involved in CLIs. People in vulnerable socio-economic situations and minority groups do not have the same luxury, and may have fragile trust in governmental institutions where they do not see themselves represented. Furthermore, neoliberal systems promote individualism and free-market capitalism, which both reduce emphasis on collective solutions and can disincentive personal activism and civic engagement through overwork and non-economic valuation of engagement. Consequently, government collaboration with CLIs must come with other types of engagement and support.

In brief, CLIs and local governments need better awareness of these challenges and of tools for engaging with each other to create more sustainable and equitable futures.

# WHAT TIPS ARE THERE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND CLIs TO COLLABORATE BETTER?

Fortunately, many local governments and CLIs believe that effective societal change comes only from acting together, and they have tips for those looking to do so.

## FOR COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

### COME PREPARED

The way your initiative presents itself to institutions like a local government often determines the quality of the relationship and level of trust that can be developed. Arriving well-prepared and aware of how the local government generally works (e.g. organisationally, key responsibilities, key policy issues etc.) is important for opening a fruitful conversation. Try putting yourself in the perspective of the staff or departments you're contacting: What power do they have? What are their tasks and priorities? Local governments say that they appreciate when CLIs are organised and show how the initiative can contribute to their goals.



“ IN MY EXPERIENCE THE FIRST STAGES OF CONTACT ARE CRUCIAL, IF YOU ARE LABELLED AS THE USUAL COMPLAINERS WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE WORLD REALLY WORKS YOU WON'T GET VERY FAR. ”

TRANSITION ITALIA CO-FOUNDER, ITALY

### KNOW AND SHOW YOUR VALUE

You likely have topical expertise, capacity and motivation that your local government is looking for. Approaching with a demand is not as effective as opening by showing your value. Emphasise your ability to bring local knowledge and to act as a communicator and multiplier through your networks.



“COLLABORATION IS A WIN FOR OUR DEPARTMENT, BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE TO LOOK ANYWHERE FOR PEOPLE - HERE THEY ARE WITH THE SAME GOAL AND EXTRA PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND NETWORKS. NO AGENCY WOULD HAVE THE NETWORKS THAT THESE CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS HAVE.”

MUNICIPAL CLIMATE PROTECTION MANAGER, GERMANY

## WORK WITH SYMPATHETIC INSIDERS

There are individuals within local governments who are open to change and may need support to overcome internal resistance. External impulses from CLIs can be incredibly useful in these cases. You can identify and work with these individuals within the municipal system who are open to innovation and have a forward-thinking mentality for collaborative projects. Without asking for too much commitment right away, build rapport and work step-by-step, eventually getting integrated in other departments as well. This will build resilience in case of personnel changes.

## FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

### PROVIDE SIMPLE FUNDING WITH ADDED SUPPORT

A little funding and guidance from you, a local government, can help a CLI build themselves up into a proficient partner for achieving your municipal sustainability and equity goals. Examples are plentiful! e.g. “Sustainable Neighbourhoods Facilitator Service” Brussels (Fr/Nl, <https://t.ly/D7yww>), “AdaptCascais Fund” Cascais (Pt, <https://t.ly/YqzKs>), “Participatory voting on citizen-submitted projects” Amsterdam (<https://t.ly/Qhb10>). Regarding the groups you chose to collaborate with, remember that you should be open to a variety of CLIs – not just the better-connected and capacitated ones. Working with more informal CLIs and CLIs representing the needs of marginalised groups encourages equality of opportunity. Some guidance from your side may be helpful here, as more informal CLIs can lack project management skills.

For further findings on money matters, read our summary of how funders can support and empower CLIs (<https://t.ly/hJnse>).





“ TAKE THE TIME TO LISTEN TO WHAT THE CLI WANTS, TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, AND TO DISCUSS WHAT THE COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK AND OUTPUTS WILL LOOK LIKE. START WITH SMALL PROJECTS AND KEEP DOORS OPEN FOR GROWTH IN THE FUTURE. ”

MUNICIPAL CLIMATE PROTECTION MANAGER, GERMANY

## TRANSPARENCY, CONSISTENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY MATTER

Every collaboration partner naturally values these traits, but CLIs have specifically highlighted them as key for a productive relationship with their local government. This can take shape as regular meetings with follow-ups and moments for honest reflection. Clear presentation of ‘who does what’ on a government website is also seen as useful. Finally, a multi-lingual approach and replacing jargon with commonly-known terms is needed for reaching non-native language speakers and communities more broadly.

## TRY REDUCING POWER DIFFERENCES

CLIs indicate that there are few occasions where collaboration between them and local governments can take place free of power imbalances. Although this power difference is persistent, you can try to minimise it so that CLIs feel like an equal partner. For example, try meeting in power-neutral spaces, like informal or third party spaces, where you are not necessarily hosting. Also consider moving up the participation ladder, from consultation towards co-creation, or sidelining majority voting methods and instead experimenting with more inclusive, alternative decision-making methods, like Sociocracy’s consent-based decision making (<https://bit.ly/3ZFfb7h>).

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

Connecting as people with a shared passion for making your city a better place encourages deeper connections and more fruitful collaborations. Appointing an accessible contact person in your local government to liaise with CLIs will boost relations (e.g. “Agenda 21 Office” Oberhausen (De, <https://bit.ly/3BIBIfm>)). Investing time and care into dialogue with the people running CLIs likely provides unexpected returns for both of you. In the end, both CLIs and local government staff who contributed to this booklet said that productive and pleasant collaboration is always about the people! They recommend acknowledging each other’s efforts and celebrating wins together.

