

# Collecting the City

Co-creation:  
A work in progress



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# Collecting the City

Co-creation:  
A work in progress

# Acknowledgement

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Projects based on equity, in which ownership is shared; that is the core of co-creation. This method is frequently employed by the Amsterdam Museum, but in essence is only possible with the many partners and co-owners of the projects. Therefore we thank our various partners, local residents, participatory collaborators, curators, theater makers, storytellers, and collection and museum staff for their cooperation. They know how important the role of art and culture is for a better and healthier society. Together we make these projects possible and are able to tell varied narratives from different parts of society.

# Disclaimer

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This publication is based on various projects from our *Collecting the City* programming, which the Amsterdam Museum has realized in recent years through co-creation with different collaborative partners. We compiled this tool kit based on findings from these collaborations. The tool kit describes one of the possible ways co-creation can be utilized. It is not the only way; around the world, co-creation is employed in many other different and successful ways as well. Co-creation is a method that the Amsterdam Museum enjoys employing in various projects, so the aim of this publication is to share the knowledge we have gained with a wider audience.

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# Introduction



# Introduction

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On August 24, 2022, during the General Conference in Prague, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) gathered to vote on a new definition of the museum. An impressive 92.4% of those present voted in favor, and so the new definition became fact: “Museums operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities.” Besides a focus on sustainability and inclusion, collaboration with communities should also be one the core tasks of museums worldwide. In a society that is becoming increasingly diverse, museums are seeking new ways to be relevant and representative for a wide audience. Besides developing programs about or for communities, focus is now also shifting to collaborations with those communities. The question is, however: How does one approach such a collaboration?

# Introduction

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This publication by the Amsterdam Museum is an answer to that question. Its aim is to provide partner museums with inspiration and practical tools for working with communities. As part of the *Collecting the City* programing, the museum collects and presents topical or underexposed stories from the city. Every half year, *Collecting the City* presents three exhibitions at the museum's temporary location on the Amstel, while also offering continuing programming in each district of the city, always in collaboration with the city itself. To this end, the museum joins forces with four partners (Municipality of Amsterdam, OBA, Amsterdam City Archives, and the University of Amsterdam) and the residents themselves. After all, the inhabitants of Amsterdam are experts when it comes to which topics are active in the districts and neighborhoods and which stories deserve attention on a larger, museum scale.

The exhibitions and programs which the Amsterdam Museum develops with partners and residents as part of *Collecting the City* are based on a co-creative methodology. The associated working methods and the subject of this publication have received much attention in recent years. Particularly among museums that strive to achieve a more inclusive way to generate what they offer. Although co-creation in the museum world is often mentioned in the same breath as participation, the methods differ from one another and co-creation goes a step further than participation. Whereas participation asks participants to contribute to a predetermined result, co-creation requires a different approach. Namely, an extremely specific form of cooperation based on

equity and process-based initiative. Through co-creation, partners and residents become co-owners of an exhibition or program by working together as equals in the process, from start to finish.

Co-creation is becoming increasingly popular, and yet it is certainly not a new phenomenon. Its roots lie in community art, a form of social art that flourished in the 1960s through the activities of British and other artists. Artists would apply to receive a subsidy from the Arts Council to realize projects with and in the community. The goal: to stimulate emancipation and self-awareness among participants, using art and government support as a means to this end. Due to continuing and increasing demand, the council decided to create a new subsidy category, and thus community art was born. The art form has since grown into a global phenomenon, and co-creation is among its many forms of expression.

The Amsterdam Museum therefore draws from a rich history. Not only from within community art but also within the museum. *Collecting the City* builds on this legacy of great projects. One such project is *Buurtwinkels* (Neighborhood Shops, 2010–2011), a comprehensive and innovative project under the inspiring leadership of the former head of Education and Participation, Annemarie van Eekeren, and curator Annemarie de Wildt. *Buurtwinkels* was built on the involvement of the Amsterdam Museum in the project *Geheugen van Oost* (Memory of East, 2002–2008), which was led by the former head of Education, Mila van Ernst. By experimenting with crowdsourcing—in which (professional) tasks are outsourced to a wider audience—



# Introduction

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the museum challenged Amsterdam residents to build closer relationships with local shops. In a contemporary and casual manner, shop owners told stories about the ins and outs of their businesses while residents, as consumers, experienced the influence they themselves have on shops in the city. The project's outcome included an exhibition in what was then the Amsterdam Historical Museum and a presentation in a former bed store in Amsterdam Noord. Manifestations also took place in a coffeehouse in Amsterdam Oost and even online, through a website that collected stories about neighborhood shops. Anyone who wanted to contribute could do so. Throughout these activities, Annemarie van Eekeren, Annemarie de Wildt, and Mila Ernst worked closely with partners and volunteers.

A more recent example is *New Narratives* (2016–present). In this series of discussions and guided tours, people from outside the museum are invited to give an open and honest opinion about the collection. For a short time they become a guide instead of a writer, programmer, spoken word artist, student, or professional. By sharing their personal stories about topics such as gender, shared history, religion, and culture, it becomes apparent which stories we tell (each other)—both in museums and in the world outside them. *New Narratives* was developed in 2016 by curator Imara Limon, who was involved as guest curator in the exhibition *Zwart Amsterdam* in the same period. Limon utilized this method to bring more voices of color into the collection. Powered by research into (internal) diversity and inclusion, and the dedication of research assistant Vanessa Vroon-Najem,

*New Narratives* has grown since 2018 into a whole series of programming. The discussions and tours contribute to the Amsterdam Museum's ambition to become an increasingly inclusive, multivocal city museum through such things as public programming, knowledge exchange (public and behind the scenes), international research on the collection with the University of Amsterdam, and collaborations with, for example, OSCAM, The Black Archives, and Pride Amsterdam.

Based on more than ten years of experience, the Amsterdam Museum is in a position to contribute to developing a practical method. This publication is a first step toward a common language and set of tools for co-creation for and with partner museums. The museum is emphatic in choosing for a multivocal approach. The knowledge packed into in this publication has been gathered both inside and outside the walls of the museum. Essential in this respect are the experiences of professionals, partners, and creative practices in other fields and disciplines such as theaters, libraries, the social domain, archives, and community centers. Every partner and resident differs, and therefore every working method is different. Nevertheless, all projects are based on the same four core values, which together comprise the Amsterdam Museum's co-creation method.

# Introduction

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## 1. Equity

Co-creation always begins with a collaboration based on equity. Each participating party is equal to the others when it comes to the decision-making process and reaching a verdict. By sharing the creative management of a project, exhibition, or program with partners and residents, they become co-owners of the content.

## 2. Reciprocity

Working together on an equal footing with partners and residents enables two-way traffic. Both parties in the cooperation give something to the other and receive something else in return. The first step is therefore mapping out what everyone contributes and needs. This exchange remains central to the collaboration.

## 3. Empowerment

By approaching partners and residents as equals, they are able to make their own decisions as a community and retain control over their story/opinion/idea. The project is always driven by empowering the partners and creates opportunities to express this strength.

## 4. Belonging

Co-creation is about a sense of belonging; being heard and seen, knowing that your story, contribution, or opinion matters. Through their own involvement and ownership when it comes to a project, exhibition, or program, partners and residents gain solidarity, becoming part of a larger whole.

# Introduction

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This publication consists of three chapters. The first chapter comprises a tool kit in which the Amsterdam Museum's co-creation method is laid out, step by step. On the basis of five co-creation projects, the second chapter illustrates how this stepwise plan can be put into practice. Each project is supported by statements from various stakeholders, plus an overview of best practices and findings. The third chapter describes the path to impact thinking. Using two examples, we demonstrate how the impact of already completed co-creation projects is measured and shared by the Amsterdam Museum.

The publication's content was created through a process of co-creation between Gonca Yalçiner (Education & Participation Manager), Joost Nikkessen (Participation Educator), Femke Awater (Project Leader, *Collecting the City*), and individuals involved in co-creation projects. Due to her background in theater, where co-creation is a commonly applied method, Gonca Yalçiner is well-versed in developing and coordinating projects with diverse communities and networks. As part of her activities in the museum and the city, she draws inspiration from the co-creative working methods seen in theater. This publication stems from her ambition to exchange structural knowledge about co-creation between museums, thereby jointly contributing to a relevant and representative cultural sector. She translated her findings into a stepwise plan in late 2021, which in turn forms the basis of this tool kit.

As a follow-up, in 2022 she spoke with partners about their experiences. These conversations are reflected in the statements highlighted in chapter 3. Teaming up with

Joost Nikkessen and Femke Awater, she worked toward outlining a method for co-creation. Joost's background in art theory and education is expressed in a love for theory and language. Femke uses perspectives from her background in cultural anthropology and journalism in her daily work, where she carries out co-creation projects with different communities in order to make the Amsterdam Museum a place for all Amsterdammers. Her focus lies in collecting and telling stories, always in collaboration with others and from a position as equals. This publication is the outcome of close cooperation between colleagues of different backgrounds, a combination of theory and practice and a continual process of writing and rewriting. The Amsterdam Museum views this working method as a perfect example of co-creation. It is precisely because various perspectives are connected that new ideas emerge.

The aim of this publication is twofold. First, it seeks to offer inspiration and practical tools to partner museums for working through co-creation. Second, the publication is itself a work in progress, and seeks to further develop the Amsterdam Museum's co-creation method together with partner museums. This handbook is therefore by no means complete or finished. On the contrary, partner museums are invited to contribute to the continuing development of this living document by adding their own findings.

# 2

## Tool kit

A large, stylized 'X' graphic is centered on the page. It is formed by four thick, solid-colored diagonal lines that intersect in the middle. The lines are colored brown, pink, yellow, and teal. The brown line runs from the top-left towards the bottom-right. The pink line runs from the top-right towards the bottom-left. The yellow line runs from the bottom-left towards the top-right. The teal line runs from the top-left towards the bottom-right, overlapping the brown line.

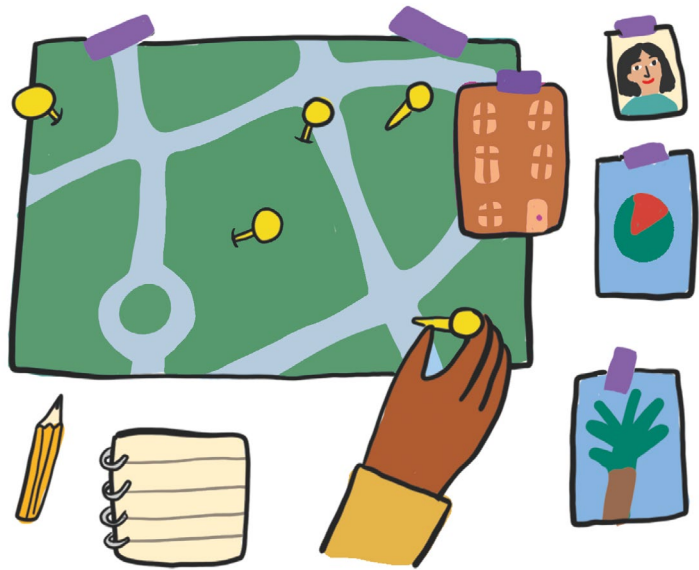
The tool kit is a fifteen-step plan in which the Amsterdam Museum's method of co-creation is outlined. The co-creation process consists of four phases: research, preparation, execution, and evaluation. Although this chapter introduces the phases in chronological order, it is important to realize that, in practice, processes often evolve differently, or steps run parallel. This handbook is therefore by no means comprehensive. On the contrary, partner museums are invited to contribute to the continuing development of this living document by adding their own findings.

# Tool kit — Phase 1: Research

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## 1. Desk research

Research the context of the co-creation and get a feel for the target neighborhood. Collect and analyze demographic, social, cultural, and economic data about the residents. This preliminary investigation offers an initial and objective insight into who and what the neighborhood is about.



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## 2. Working in the neighborhood

Visit the neighborhood to speak with various residents. Ask about their desires and needs. Talk to key figures who have a strong base of support, as well as residents who tend to be in the background or are more difficult to reach.

### Sample questions:

- Which topics and questions are there in the neighborhood?
- What are the residents' desires and needs?
- Which organizations and residents are involved?
- What is currently offered?
- What can we offer each other?
- Who else should we speak to?



# Tool kit — Phase 2: Preparation

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## 3. Looking for a partner organization

Create support at the local level by looking for a partner organization in the neighborhood. Based on conversations with residents, determine the selection criteria for this partner organization.



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## 4. Getting acquainted with potential partners

Approach potential partners, along with key neighborhood figures. Get acquainted through conversations with various organizations. When communicating with potential partners, be transparent regarding the selection criteria.

### Sample questions:

- What do you do in the neighborhood?
- With whom and how do you work together?
- What needs are there?
- What are your concerns?
- Do you have a common goal?

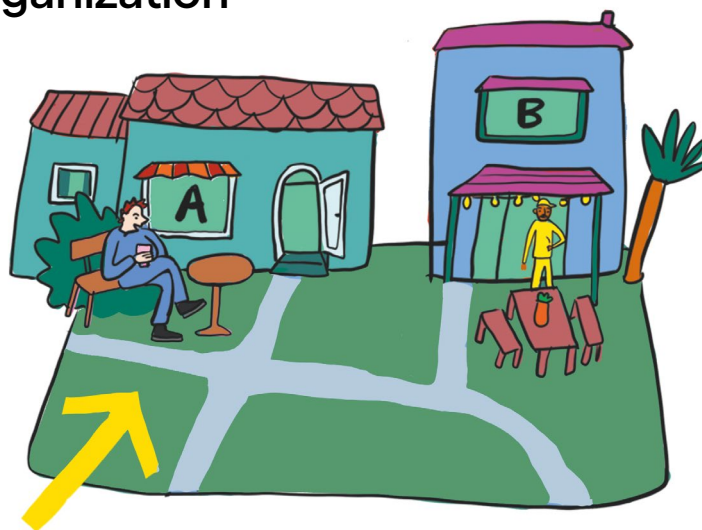


# Tool kit — Phase 2: Preparation

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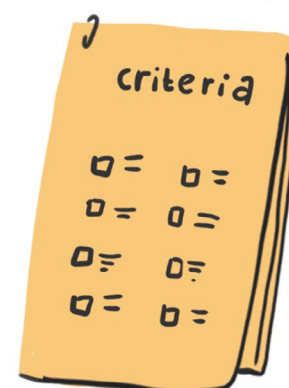
## 5. Selecting the partner organization

Based on the conversations where you got acquainted with potential partners, select the right partner organization. When in doubt, hold follow-up conversations. Make sure mutual communication is coordinated and schedule a check-in every two days, so the cooperating parties remain up to date on all developments.



## 6. Selecting makers

Assemble an advisory team for selecting the right makers (artists, designers, photographers, theater makers, musicians, storytellers, etc.). Involve a curator, educator, the partner organization, residents, and others. Together, consider what criteria the makers must meet and determine the selection criteria based on this. Preferably, makers live or work in the neighborhood and are familiar with participatory working methods.



**Tip:**  
Get to know the makers' own networks in order to potentially broaden the collaboration to include other (participatory) makers.



# Tool kit — Phase 2: Preparation

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## 7. Action plan

Make the ideas and activities more concrete by creating an action plan. Develop the plan together with the partner organization. Discuss the result with the makers and supplement it, if necessary.

**An action plan consists of the following parts:**

- Overview of all activities
- Goals
- Division of tasks
- Schedule
- Action points
- Communication plan



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## 8. Collaboration agreement

Detail the specifics of the collaboration with the partner organization and makers in the form of a contract. Once agreed upon, ensure the document is signed by all parties involved.

**A collaboration agreement consists of the following parts:**

- Substantive agreements
- Financial agreements
- Shared responsibilities
- Distributed responsibilities
- Mutual division of tasks



# Tool kit — Phase 3: Execution

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## 9. Enlist participants in one-on-one discussions

Choose for a personal approach; communicate one-on-one with potential participants to build a relationship and create trust in the collaboration. Speak with key figures in the neighborhood and through their network get to know local residents who tend to be in the background. Patience is crucial at this stage; the interest, turnout, and composition of participants will continually change. Plan sufficient time, therefore, for establishing and maintaining individual contacts.



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## 10. Enlist participants in (online) communication

Develop a communication plan to reach potential participants. Adjust language and tone of voice depending on the intended target group. It is important to note that social media nowadays offers popular and efficient communication channels, but not all groups necessarily use it. Local (oral) channels, such as the partner organization and key neighborhood figures, are also critical for achieving broad reach.



# Tool kit — Phase 3: Execution

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## 11. Co-creation introductory meetings

Co-creation always begins with introductory meetings at a central location in the neighborhood. Here the collaborating parties and participants will get acquainted with each other. Determine the purpose of the meetings and tailor the atmosphere accordingly (festive, intimate, relaxed, etc.). Speak one-on-one with all participants in advance and invite a maximum of ten participants to each meeting, so everyone feels heard and seen.



## 12. Co-creation workshops

The co-creation process consists of a series of workshops, developed cooperatively with the makers.

**These workshops must meet three criteria:**

1. Participants are placed directly in the role of maker
2. It stimulates an equal exchange of knowledge and skills
3. Control is placed directly in the hands of participants



**Tip:**  
In order to track the project's impact from the start, it is advisable to ask participants to fill in an initial assessment of the impact study during the first workshop.

Be transparent about the steps and goals in order to create trust in the study. Emphasize that participation in the impact study is voluntary. If necessary, the project can at this point be adapted or fine-tuned.

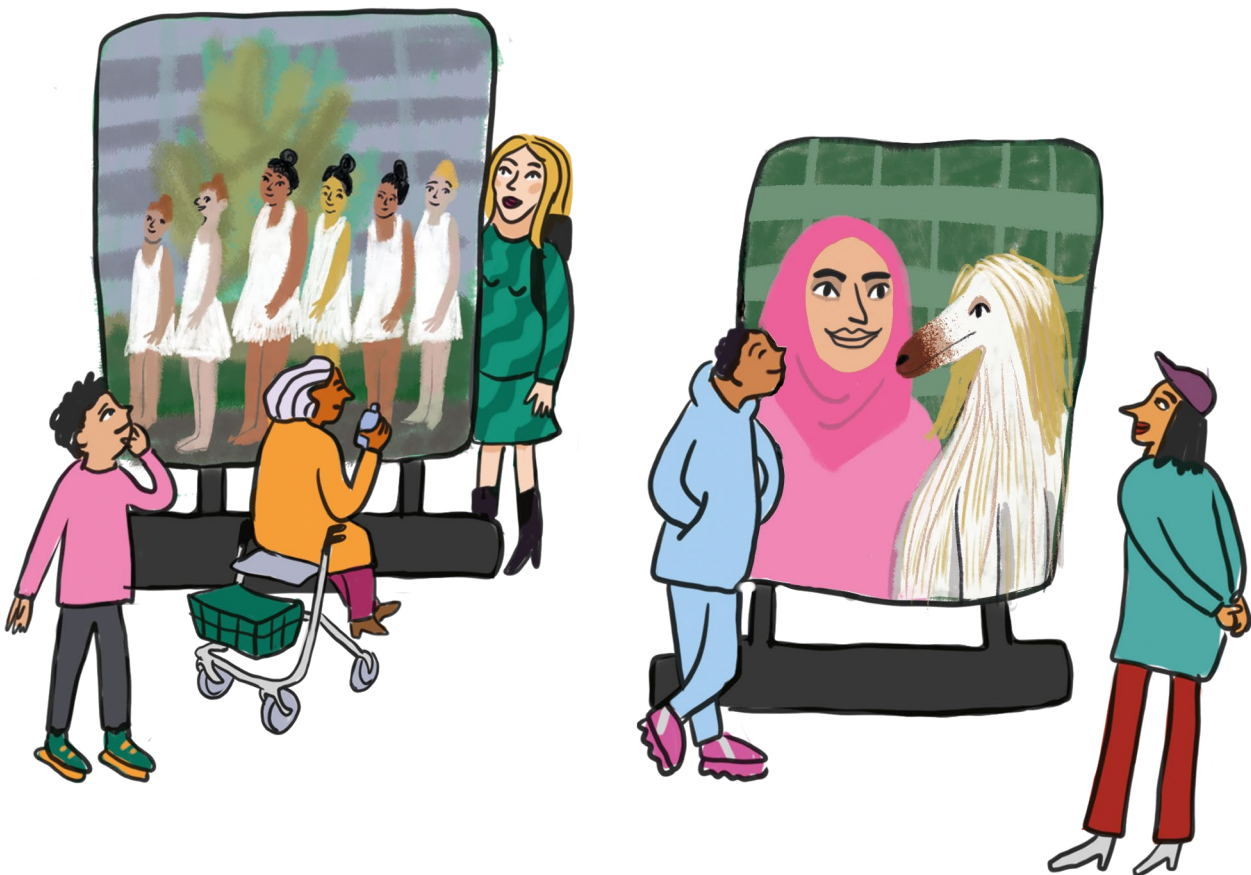
# Tool kit — Phase 3: Execution

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## 13. Neighborhood presentation

Co-curate a presentation with the participants to share the results of the workshops in and with the neighborhood. The form the presentation takes (exhibition, program, performance, intervention, etc.) differs per project. Holding the presentation primarily in a familiar or trusted location builds trust in

the collaboration and trust among the participants themselves. Recognition and appreciation within one's own circle is an important step toward visibility on a larger scale. Give participants an active role in the presentation, for instance as host or tour guide.





# Tool kit — Phase 4: Evaluation

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## 14. Wrap-up and evaluation

Organize something fun to mark the conclusion of the steps so far. Evaluate the process with the participants and carry out a final assessment of the impact study to map the results and effects. For a complete and representative picture, both the key neighborhood figures and the less visible local residents should be asked about their opinion and experience. In fact, this is to check to what extent the predetermined common goal has been achieved according to all parties involved. Present the impact study between three and six months after wrapping up the project and then re-evaluate: What is the long-term impact of the co-creation?



## 15. Securing cooperation

In essence, co-creation is about building and maintaining equal and sustainable relationships with partner organizations and participants. In this sense, co-creation does not have a finite end, but a new beginning every time. After completing these steps, discuss the possibilities of continuing to organize activities together with the partner organization and participants.



### Examples:

- Program an event or intervention in the neighborhood once or twice a year together with the partner organization.
- Involve at least two partner organizations in new exhibitions and programs at the museum every year.
- Involve participants as tour guides.
- At the museum, enrich the existing collection with their perspective and experience as co-creator.
- Initiate a program for developing talent among participants (e.g., in areas of urban programming, photography, storytelling, production, etc.).
- Using subsidy funding, invest in the neighborhood, organizations, and residents.
- Maintain a presence in the neighborhood; visit openings, events, and activities.

# 3

## Co-creation projects



# Co-creation projects

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The previous chapter laid out the steps of the Amsterdam Museum's method of co-creation. This chapter on co-creation projects will illustrate how the stepwise plan can be put into practice. Its motto: "Every collaborative partner is different, every project is different, and therefore every working method is different." On the basis of five co-creation projects, this chapter provides insight into how the method is interpreted differently each time. Statements from various stakeholders are highlighted along with each project, emphasizing the multivocality of the methods described, and each includes an overview of best practices and findings. The aim is to offer partner organizations inspiration and practical tools for working in a co-creative environment.

# 3.1

## Women of Nieuw-West

In 2018 the Amsterdam Museum and Pakhuis de Zwijger, a platform for creation and social innovation, made an agreement to undertake a collaborative project in the Nieuw-West district of the city. In 2019, *Women of Nieuw-West* became a reality. That same year, we celebrated the centenary of women's suffrage in the Netherlands, the right of women to vote in elections and run for office. Soon thereafter, the idea of undertaking a co-creation project with the women in and from Nieuw-West emerged.





# Women of Nieuw-West

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The Amsterdam Museum and Pakhuis de Zwijger kicked off the co-creation effort with the women of Nieuw-West through two workshops: photography and storytelling. The workshops formed a strong start to the project, laying the foundations for an equal partnership in three ways. Based on an equal exchange of knowledge and skills, the workshops placed the participants directly in the role of maker. In this way, the participants themselves became responsible for the co-creation.

The results of the workshops were subsequently presented in the form of neighborhood exhibitions in Nieuw-West. By initially opening the exhibitions in places that were familiar or trusted by the participants, trust in the collaboration and the self-confidence of the participants grew. The recognition and appreciation the participants received within their district strengthened a desire for visibility on a larger scale. This promise was fulfilled by a traveling exhibition. The results of the workshops—a statement about the power of women’s networks—could now also be viewed in the city center.

“Visibility was the most important aspect for Vrouw en Vaart. We don’t usually see the women who meet at the emancipation center in a museum. Which is remarkable, because Amsterdam really is a city of migrants. The stories of women who come here to start a new life are part of the city’s history. The women of Nieuw-West are now presented in photographs. Yet there was no pressure at all, for example, if women did not want to be photographed. I enjoy how the collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum keeps going, taking on new forms each time.”

Marlijn van de Pol,  
team leader at Vrouw en Vaart

“On International Women’s Day we heard stories of protest during the Women’s Dinner in the Meervaat, shared tales of migration during an iftar at De Honingraad, and ended the evening dancing at The Beach. The most beautiful moments during these gatherings were the moments when we saw young girls listening to the stories. It was almost as if seeds of progress were being planted in their hearts and minds. Emancipation in real time. To further develop Nieuw-West, we need the creativity, intelligence, and perseverance of our women.”

Touria Meliani, municipal administrator for Culture, ICT, Personnel & Organization in Nieuw-West, and Emre Ünver, executive board chair for Nieuw-West

The final exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum brought the collaboration full circle; in addition to a local and traveling edition, *Women of Nieuw-West* was held in a museum setting. From July 10 until September 27, 2020, the women were exhibited in the museum and got the opportunity to share their photographs and stories, which are part of the city’s history, with a wide audience.

*Women of Nieuw-West* resulted in a broader collaboration with the district. The project inspired district chair Emre Ünver to establish a Women’s Agenda. *Women of Nieuw-West* led to collaborations with other city districts as well. What was launched in 2018 as a joint initiative by the Amsterdam Museum, Pakhuis de Zwijger, and the female half of Nieuw-West has now grown into a genuine “Women of” series, with additional programming in Noord and Zuidoost.



# Women of Nieuw-West

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“When Vrouw en Vaart was approached by the Amsterdam Museum for a collaboration, I was skeptical at first. I make sure that the women aren’t used for museums’ own interests. On the other hand, the collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum was marked by respect. It was quite a task to photograph so many women. This would never have been possible without the dedication of the project leaders and photographers: women who use their own talents to offer other women a platform. The neighborhood exhibition opened the day after the first coronavirus lockdown, but the turnout was huge.”

Joke Kop, former team leader  
at Vrouw en Vaart

Anush Avetisyan, participant  
in *Women of Nieuw-West*

The first time I came to the Amsterdam Museum for the Photography & Storytelling workshop, I saw a photo exhibition of beautiful women, portrayed in black and white. It said ‘Strong Women.’ I looked at it, and wasn’t able to recognize myself in any one of the photos, while I really do consider myself strong. I said to the project leader, who was of Turkish descent: ‘We are not represented here at all, let’s change that!’ Self-reliance and independence come from gathering and sharing as much knowledge as possible. You need to share your stories with each other.”

## Best practices

- The project gave visibility to the (migration) stories of women that are not usually shown in a museum.
- The photoshoot was voluntary, which lowered the threshold for participation and ensured no one felt left out.
- The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and Vrouw en Vaart will be maintained and strengthened through continuing to seek new opportunities for co-creation.
- The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and Vrouw en Vaart was marked by respect. The wishes and needs of the women of Nieuw-West were foremost.
- The women who coordinated and photographed the project used their artistic, organizational, and networking talents to empower the women of Nieuw-West.
- Although the neighborhood exhibition opened on the day after the first pandemic lockdown (following necessary health safety measures), the turnout was unexpectedly high.
- The story evenings offered a platform for women to tell and share their stories. Not just about femininity or being a woman, but also about topics such as protest and migration.
- The stories reached and inspired young women and girls.

## Findings

- How femininity was highlighted was initially too one-sided; some participants did not see themselves in the female image that was presented at first.
- The project was a starting point and a playing field; to further develop Nieuw-West, it is essential that participants maintain and invest the knowledge and skills they have gained.

# 3.2

## Jacob Geel Museum

I want to become a philologist, just like Jacob Geel!” With these words a journey started, right through the “fabric” of a neighborhood in transition, the Jacob Geelbuurt. Jacob Geel (1789–1862) studied archaic and forgotten languages. In the fall of 2020, photographer and storytelling coach Fouad Lakbir and radio and podcast host Jesper Buursink saw the neighborhood through a young person’s eyes, together with its residents. With a good dose of curiosity, they stumbled into both extraordinary people and their own prejudices. Fouad and Jesper documented residents’ knowledge and the language of the neighborhood in audio recordings and artworks. This ranged from their personal interests, the nicknames for fellow residents in the building, and their favorite places, to the network of neighbors, the thoughts of professionals in the neighborhood, the recipes that get exchanged, and who is sought out or avoided. Everything was documented.



# Jacob Geel Museum

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Months spent gathering resulted in a diverse collection of stories and objects that provided a personal picture of the meaning of the neighborhood for the people who had lived their lives there, and which urban renewal was forcing them to say farewell. Their homes would be renovated or demolished. They moved through the city looking for a new start, or hoped to remain in their familiar surroundings. A walk through the Jacob Geelbuurt offered a personal insight into this dynamic—close to home but also viewed from a distance.

From April 23 through May 1, 2021, the Hemsterhuisstraat became a temporary open-air museum: the *Jacob Geel Museum*. While wandering through half-empty apartments and stairwells, along sidewalks and playgrounds, visitors were drawn into the capillaries of the Jacob Geelbuurt and, like philologists, they looked at the daily lives of eight residents through their own eyes in a changing neighborhood. What back then was taken for granted, has since vanished.

“When you are forced to move, it’s like a bomb drops on your life. It is so important to show what the impact of a change like this is, what it does to residents. The project helped to mitigate this difficult situation a bit. By going through the streets with a microphone and speaking with fellow residents, I found out that everyone experienced the renewals differently, and many were worried. I regret that more residents weren’t involved in the project, whether out of sorrow or reticence. The neighborhood was like a TV series, where different people with different stories all came together.”

Majda Boukari, former Hemsterhuisstraat resident

“The Jacob Geel Museum started with a conversation with two boys at a playground, Kossay and Louay. This initially aroused the suspicions of their mother, Majda, who was sunning herself nearby, but ultimately she became a crucial link in the project. She was a bridge to other residents, and made her living room available as a studio. No one was director or project leader. As creators, we became part of the audio recordings and artworks as well. You hear our preconceptions and the presumptions we made. The outcome is sometimes chaotic, but honest. What you see is what you get.”

Fouad Lakbir, photographer and storytelling coach, and Jesper Buursink, radio and podcast host

The temporary open-air museum on the Hemsterhuisstraat was followed by the exhibition *Jacob Geel Chronicles*, from March 9 to September 28, 2022, at the Amsterdam Museum. The exhibition, which was again realized by Fouad, Jesper, and the residents of the Jacob Geelbuurt, was a journey back in time to the “original” Jacob Geelbuurt. Audio was an important part of the presentation. Through sound, visitors were transported to the old neighborhood, to a time before the flats were demolished and the interconnections between residents were undone.



# Jacob Geel Museum

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“I really liked going around with Fouad and Jesper, it made us feel important. Together with them, I made a painting with my mother Majda and brother Louay. It shows us, a mother and two children, in the beautiful neighborhood where we lived. I would have enjoyed staying there longer. It’s good that not just our painting is hanging in the museum. If you make an exhibition about the Jacob Geelbuurt, you really need to show a lot! I hope the painting will still be there in a hundred years, so that new generations can see the neighborhood.”

Kossay Raçaf, former Hemsterhuisstraat resident

## Best practices

- The project highlighted a current theme in the city, urban renewal, from the perspectives of the Jacob Geelbuurt’s residents.
- The project made the (emotional) impact of urban renewal on local residents visible to a wide and diverse audience.
- The project started out from a basis of equality, a conversation with local residents.
- The division of roles within the co-creation process remained balanced; project management was shared by makers and local residents.
- The project opened a dialogue among local residents; by speaking with their fellow residents, people found connections with each other, or a different view of things.
- Fouad and Jesper created a sense of belonging among the local residents; by gathering stories in and with the neighborhood, residents felt seen and heard.

Their stories mattered. Fouad and Jesper were aware of and transparent about their own preconceptions and pitfalls.

- Because of the project, the “original” Jacob Geelbuurt is now intangible heritage. The neighborhood as it was is gone, but the stories of its residents remain audible and visible.

## Findings

- Due to the project’s emotional nature, the turnout of local residents was sometimes low.
- The outcome can be considered somewhat chaotic, since the contributions of its creators were intermingled with what the local residents themselves expressed.
- To represent the diversity of the Jacob Geelbuurt’s residents, additional stories could have been gathered and shown. Not all residents and their stories can be summarized in a single presentation.

# 3.3

## Brandweer- kazerne / Future Tellers

In the fall of 2020, the Amsterdam Museum commissioned TAAK, a collective that researches and develops new art forms in the public domain, to realize a social-artistic project in the Reigersbos neighborhood of Amsterdam Zuidoost. TAAK sought cooperation with the Brandweerkazerne, a creative incubator located at the heart of the neighborhood. Under the project title *Gedeelde Grond/Future Telling*, they brought together a group of young people between the ages of 17 and 22, called the Future Tellers, who started a discussion with each other about topics that concern the youth in Reigersbos. The goal of the five sessions was to visualize the future of the neighborhood based on shared values and to find out how young people can and want to contribute to the surroundings where they live.





# Brandweerkazerne / Future Tellers

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The first session entailed a discussion about ownership and being able to feel at home in the neighborhood where you live. The young people were asked to sketch a moment when they felt ownership of their surroundings, or not. During the course of the discussion, they exchanged various perspectives. "It's always policymakers and administrators who have the floor. Never the residents," someone declared. "Young people in particular aren't listened to. I want to make our voice known," added another. At this point the conversation gave way to direct action: What can the Future Tellers do to awaken, claim, and pass on this sense of ownership within themselves?

This desire was realized in the form of a manifesto. With direct action as the starting point of the second session, each young person wrote part of the text. At the end of the meeting, the result was collectively presented. Now that the ideals the Future Tellers endeavored to achieve as a collective were laid out in black and white, during the third session they explored their mutual

roles and relationships. Positioning themselves between a piece of wood, tangle of ivy, cow skull, and gasoline engine, they explored the tension between rich and poor, between whites and persons of color, the reality of today, and the uncertain future. By constantly repositioning the objects and themselves, the young people became aware of their own perspectives and those of others.

During the fourth and fifth sessions, the Future Tellers translated the insights they had gained into images of the future through collages, poems, a magazine including the manifesto, and a presentation on March 5, 2021.

The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and the Future Tellers will be continued. Now that the Brandweerkazerne is threatened with closure, the museum is working together with the young people on a manifesto advocating recognition of the creative incubator's heritage status.



"All ideas originated from scratch at our worktable in the Brandweerkazerne. We knew for sure the project had to be about young people, gentrification, and the future of Reigersbos. My goal was to create a platform for creative young people from the neighborhood to come together, exchange ideas, and make our voices heard with the municipality, the district, and political parties. The role of the Amsterdam Museum expanded as the project went on. The museum believed in our plans for the future, but it would have been nice if the museum had also seen how the ideas emerged on paper during the sessions. This is the start of a long-term collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum. Together we're going to create many more beautiful projects."

Joy-Ann Sibelo, Brandweerkazerne/Future Tellers program coordinator

## Best practices

- The sessions were held in the context of empowerment: they awakened a sense of ownership of (the future of) Reigersbos among participants.
- This sense of ownership was kindled among a group that usually feels less heard: young people from Reigersbos between the ages of 17 and 22 years old.
- The Future Tellers were an answer to the demand by young people for a social, creative, and political platform.
- During the sessions, the Future Tellers exchanged different perspectives on ownership.
- The sessions stimulated both collective ownership, in the form of a jointly written manifesto, and individual ownership, reflected in personal visions on the future.
- The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and the Future Tellers will be sustained through a manifesto advocating the existence and preservation of the Brandweerkazerne.

## Findings

- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the first two sessions took place online, while a need for direct action was foremost in the discussions between the Future Tellers.
- The Amsterdam Museum's involvement grew as the project progressed, while the sessions during the co-creation process were determinative for the development of the future plans of the Future Tellers.

# 3.4

## 30 Years after the Bijlmer Airplane Crash

October 4, 2022, marks 30 years since a cargo aircraft belonging to Israeli airline El Al crashed into the Groeneveld and the Klein-Kruitberg apartment blocks in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The disaster killed at least 43 people and injured many others. The Bijlmer airplane crash has left deep scars in Zuidoost, but it still lacks broader attention at the city level. Although the crash was widely covered in the media at the time, many who were involved and the residents of Zuidoost share the feeling that the event has been downplayed. Which is why the Amsterdam Museum, in collaboration with Imagine IC, a heritage institution based in Zuidoost, developed two exhibitions to mark the 30th anniversary of the Bijlmer airplane crash.





# 30 Years after the Bijlmer Airplane Crash

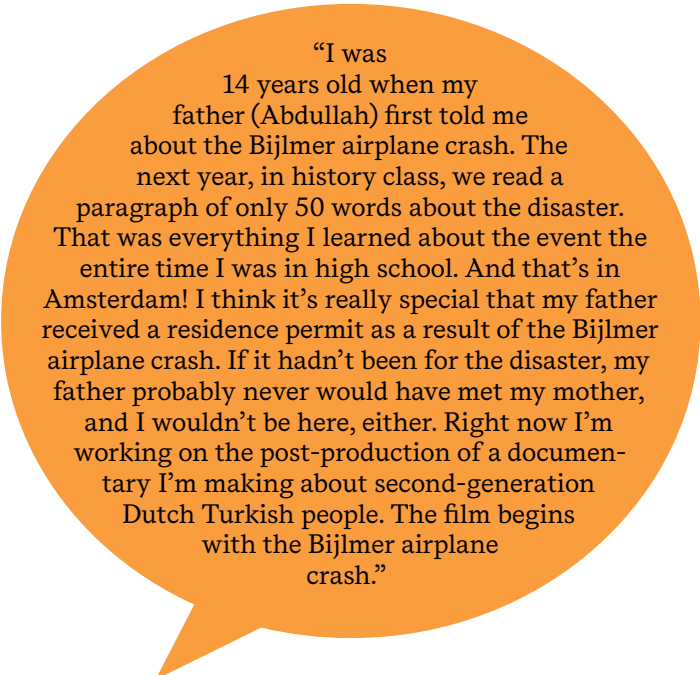
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Back in 2017, Imagine IC spotlighted 25 years since the Bijlmer airplane crash in the form of the participatory traveling exhibition *Herdenken op gevoel*. Its central premise was the emotional impact of the disaster on Zuidoost. The essence of this edition remained the same: generating visibility concerning the stories of those involved and residents of the city. The exhibitions at the Amsterdam Museum and Imagine IC examined the disaster both at the macro level of Amsterdam and the micro level of Zuidoost. In a general sense, the exhibitions likewise thematized the commemoration of the disaster from the different perspectives of those involved and residents of the city. More specifically, the exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum thematized the inclusive and intergenerational commemoration of the crash: How do various communities and generations throughout the city and over time remember this grievous event?

Since the Bijlmer airplane crash is a topic of concern to every city district, the co-creation was launched with two participatory gatherings, at the Amsterdam Museum and Imagine IC. Through more than 150 partner organizations, the Amsterdam Museum called on the city's residents to discuss the disaster under the motto

“learning by listening.” On June 2 and 9, 2022, a varied group of participants, including a doctor, artist, designer, and one former resident of Groeneveen, shared their recollections through stories, photographs, and objects. This input formed the basis of the exhibition that opened at the Amsterdam Museum on September 25, 2022.

The co-creation process leading up to the exhibitions was determined through follow-up discussions with those who partook in the participatory gatherings and a weekly meeting where the Amsterdam Museum and Imagine IC traded their knowledge and network. Although the presentations occurred in parallel to each other, the cooperating parties were open to possible intersections and overlaps.



“I was 14 years old when my father (Abdullah) first told me about the Bijlmer airplane crash. The next year, in history class, we read a paragraph of only 50 words about the disaster. That was everything I learned about the event the entire time I was in high school. And that’s in Amsterdam! I think it’s really special that my father received a residence permit as a result of the Bijlmer airplane crash. If it hadn’t been for the disaster, my father probably never would have met my mother, and I wouldn’t be here, either. Right now I’m working on the post-production of a documentary I’m making about second-generation Dutch Turkish people. The film begins with the Bijlmer airplane crash.”

Ahmed Batman, attended the participatory gathering at the Amsterdam Museum

# 30 Years after the Bijlmer Airplane Crash

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“I thought my time in the Netherlands was over. I didn’t get a residence permit and wanted to go back to Turkey. That night, the plan changed. I was in my bedroom in the flat. It seemed like there was a bombing or an earthquake happening. The lamp went up and down. I got up to take a look. I saw fire 50 meters away, the stairwells burning and collapsing. Later, residents of the building who had survived the disaster were eligible for a residence permit. I gathered keys, photos, and videos as proof, and was eventually permitted to stay in the Netherlands. Normal life continued. I moved to another neighborhood. If I had stayed in the Bijlmer, I would be constantly reminded of what had happened... my trauma. I never discussed the crash at length with my children. A lot has changed in my life in the meantime.”

Abdullah Batman, attended the participatory gathering at the Amsterdam Museum

## Best practices

- The exhibitions were developed through co-creation with the city from the notion that the topic, the Bijlmer airplane crash, is part of the city and is of concern to every city district.
- A varied group of people attended the participatory gatherings; different communities and generations shared their stories and recollections of the disaster.
- The participatory gatherings took place in both Centrum and Zuidooost, generating attention and visibility concerning the disaster at a city-wide level.
- Those who partook in the participatory gatherings became direct co-owners of the exhibitions; their discussions, stories, photographs, and objects determined the content and form.
- The collaboration between the Amsterdam Museum and Imagine IC was marked by transparency and reciprocity; an active exchange of knowledge and network took place.

## Findings

- The exhibitions and participatory gatherings took place separately from each other; as a consequence, the impact was mainly felt at a local rather than city-wide level.

# 3.5

## Faces of North Holland

Faces of North Holland (*Gezichten van Noord-Holland*, 2021–2024) is a four-year participatory program by the Amsterdam Museum and the Frans Hals Museum, in collaboration with (cultural) organizations and communities in the province of North Holland. The program joins two areas of expertise of the collaborating museums: co-creative work with communities in the city where the Amsterdam Museum is located and the transhistorical presentation of the Frans Hals Museum, which reveals the cross-connections between art from different periods.





# Faces of North Holland

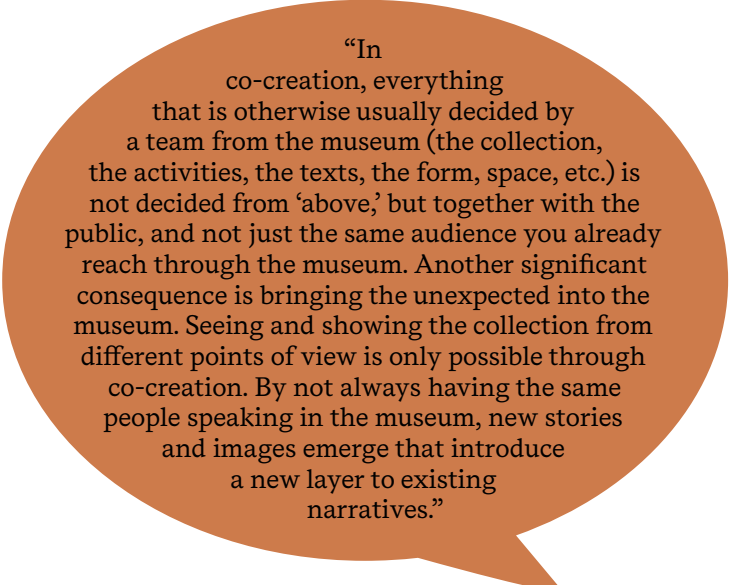
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The program creates group portraits in cooperation with various communities in the province. Group portraits in the museum collections inspire a series of portraits representing the highly diverse society of today. The existing collections are in turn enriched with new faces. Group portraits were a deliberate choice, because both museums realize how decisive image can be in telling an inclusive story. Many groups are not always directly or predominantly visible in established institutions like museums.

In order to involve as many inhabitants of North Holland as possible in the project, the program will progress along three tracks in the period from 2022 to 2024: co-creation projects, a traveling art project, and a portrait competition.

In the first track, the Amsterdam Museum and the Frans Hals Museum work with a series of different networks and artists, producing a group portrait presentation with each. These are the different co-creation projects. Three projects take place in Haarlem, while another six are organized throughout the different regions of North Holland.

The first co-creation took place in the spring of 2022. In this project, the Frans Hals Museum and children from Haarlem between the ages of 9 and 12 collaborated with visual artist Aukje Dekker on a contemporary group portrait, the *Supermens Kunstwerk* (Superhuman Artwork). The workshop took place at Kunstnest in Haarlem's Schalkwijk Library. The most recent co-creation, entitled *Be/Come as you are*, was done with the Flinty's youth center and artist AiRich. The group portrait the young people made was on view from March 31, 2023, at the Frans Hals Museum.



"In co-creation, everything that is otherwise usually decided by a team from the museum (the collection, the activities, the texts, the form, space, etc.) is not decided from 'above,' but together with the public, and not just the same audience you already reach through the museum. Another significant consequence is bringing the unexpected into the museum. Seeing and showing the collection from different points of view is only possible through co-creation. By not always having the same people speaking in the museum, new stories and images emerge that introduce a new layer to existing narratives."

Jasmine Boevé, Education & Participation staff, Frans Hals Museum

For the second track, the Stratenmakers Audiocollectief has been asked to visit different communities in North Holland in order to record various stories and audio portraits there.

The third track is a portrait competition for which all residents of North Holland can upload a group portrait. The works will be evaluated by a jury, which will also lead participants through the process of making a group portrait through different disciplines.

The group portraits produced by the different tracks will form the basis of a co-creative final exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum and the Frans Hals Museum in 2024/2025.

# Faces of North Holland

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“The interaction between the participants, partner organization, artist, and museum staff is a very important outcome, I think. I notice there’s growing awareness among museum staff that people often look at the museum and the collection in a completely different way than we do ourselves. This opens our eyes and provides input for the subjects of exhibitions and activities. It’s also really nice to experience how proud participants are when they see their artwork, and that they bring their own supporters to the museum, because in a little way the museum has become theirs as well.”

Marthe de Vet, Head of Public, Frans Hals Museum

## Best practices

- The Amsterdam Museum and the Frans Hals Museum are developing a new participatory method that moves beyond the museum by joining their expertise in the area of co-creation and transhistorical presentation in a sustainable way.
- The cooperating museums stimulate knowledge exchange by being transparent about the co-creation process and sharing their findings with partner organizations.
- The participatory program enriches the existing collections by adding portraits of (population) groups that are underrepresented in museums and characterize today’s highly diverse society.
- Co-creation brings the unexpected into the museum. By engaging with a series of different voices, new stories and images emerge that introduce a new layer to existing narratives.
- By doing programming in different neighborhoods and online, a large and diverse group of inhabitants of North Holland are reached.

## Findings

- When working with large partners it is important to have a point of contact for the smaller partner organizations in the collaboration. Not only during the co-creation project but also in the interest of maintaining the interaction and relationship afterward.
- It is important to find a balance between working according to a plan and project-based working. Co-creation demands more flexibility, but this offers space for unexpected insights from the participants, the artist, the partner, and ourselves.
- Co-creation is accomplished together, as equals. The result is sometimes less important than the path to getting there.
- Co-creation is not an isolated project, it is part of the entire organization. An important requirement for implementation is the involvement of supporters from within the organization, at both the executive and managerial level. This should become policy, so why things are done this way can always be explained within the organization.

# 4



The path  
to impact  
thinking



# The path to impact thinking

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The conclusion of the co-creation project is in sight, and now the time has come to take stock. How did the stakeholders—the partners, makers/artists, and participants—experience the co-creation process? How did it impact them? The effects of co-creation projects are not easily expressed in figures, but that does not make them any less relevant. The question then is: How can you best make the impact of co-creation projects visible?

# The path to impact thinking

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The need to provide insight into the impact of co-creation projects exists for a reason. The Dutch government believes culture plays a social function. The government's cultural policy for the period 2021–2024 states: "Culture provides enrichment: it enhances our emotional life, it makes society more close-knit and stimulates activity." Which is why the government makes funding available to cultural institutions through public funds and subsidies. The government invests in culture, with the hope that it will have social impact. Subsequently, they wish to measure the impact of this investment to assess the effects on society. In November 2020, the Council for Culture called for a subsidy system that focuses more on impact measurement (what organizations achieve) rather than qualitative output (what organizations do). The council declared that "cultural institutions should be challenged to take responsibility for the realization of their artistic mission and vision rather than the extent to which they meet the requirements of subsidy categories." However, the government, funding bodies, and cultural institutions have yet to produce a straightforward way to measure impact.

An additional question is whether measurement is the best approach. The idea of impact measurement is that it allows museums to demonstrate the relevance or value of a co-creation project. However, the result-oriented approach of impact measurement is contradictory to the process-based working method of co-creation. To what extent is it possible to measure the impact of a project that is

constantly changing in terms of participants and circumstances? Besides that, there is the risk that participants might feel as if they are part of some kind of study. Co-creation bears fruit or falters by its ability to build a bond with partners and participants. A measurement can raise the threshold for participation and unbalance an otherwise equal partnership.

Because impact thinking is currently still under development, the Amsterdam Museum prefers to use the term "impact mapping." We decided on an interdisciplinary approach to collect data through both qualitative methods, such as observations, conversations, and interviews, and quantitative methods such as (online) questionnaires. This mixed-method approach is still evolving, but the aim is that it will at least: 1. provide insight into the experience of the co-creation project by those involved; 2. provide insight into the extent to which they experience equity, reciprocity, strength, and connection; and 3. offer participants the space to share what their participation in the project has meant to them personally.

Some co-creation projects grow beyond expectations, leading to concrete further actions. That, too, is impact. *Women of Nieuw-West* is an example. The title encompasses no less than three large-scale gatherings, eight workshops, twelve neighborhood exhibitions, an outdoor exhibition with nine panels at seven locations in the city, and an exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum. What began in 2018 as a celebration of the strength and diversity of

# The path to impact thinking

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the women of Nieuw-West has now grown into a genuine “Women of” series with additional programming in Noord and Zuidoost. The project even inspired district chair Emre Ünver to establish a Women’s Agenda. The Nieuw-West executive board wants to help women to be the best they can. The aim is to give the creativity, intelligence, and perseverance of these women the space to help further develop this city district. In the meantime, the museum is still actively working on follow-ups in Nieuw-West, Noord, Zuidoost, and the city’s other districts.

In other co-creation projects the impact is not immediately measurable or visible, for instance, when it involves emotions. An example of this is a participatory art project by artist Fatric Bewong marking the 30th anniversary of the airplane crash in the Bijlmer. For the project, Bewong worked with 30 people who carry memories of the disaster with them. This group of people gathered from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM on Saturday, August 13, 2022, at the living monument of the Bijlmer airplane crash, *De boom die alles zag* (The tree that saw it all). Together with Bewong, each participant made two imprints of the tree’s bark on fabric. One imprint could be taken home while the other was incorporated in a large patchwork quilt. After making the imprints, participants were invited to share stories while eating and drinking together. This commemorative ritual was recorded and presented as a video installation in the exhibition *30 Years after the Bijlmer Airplane Crash*. During the opening, the emotional impact of this ritual truly became clear. Two

participants then spoke about the change they experienced in their own bodies as a result of making the imprints; by touching the tree they reconnected with the loved ones they had lost. While before they had not dared to approach the tree, now they had found a place for memorial and working through their emotions.

Although impact research is currently still a matter of finding the appropriate combination of methods and analysis, the Amsterdam Museum aims to already provide partner museums with inspiration and tools for the path to impact thinking. This publication therefore concludes with a list of eight questions that are good to keep in mind when thinking about impact. Since impact thinking is a work in progress, the Amsterdam Museum invites partner museums to add their own questions to the list below.

# The path to impact thinking

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**1.**

**What are the common goals of the co-creation project for the museum, the partner organizations, makers/artists, and participants?**

Ensure that the goals do not only stem from the museum's own interests but respond in particular to what the partner organization and participants want to achieve. Be attentive that the needs of the museum are not foremost, and the wishes of the partner organization and participants are equally important.

**2.**

**To which (social) issues and challenges do the goals respond?**

In consensus with the partner organization and participants, determine which points for improvement should be addressed. Describe these clearly. Only when it becomes obvious which issues and challenges are at play will it be possible to examine whether this situation can be changed.

**3.**

**Does the partner organization have experience with the issues and challenges? What worked and what did not?**

Previous experiences offer insight into how to tackle issues and challenges. Using these experiences, findings can be applied directly and proposed improvements can be tested. Explain why this organization is a suitable partner.

**4.**

**How can the co-creation project provide an answer to the issues and challenges? Which elements can realize change?**

Specify why these practices will or are expected to have an effect.



# The path to impact thinking

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**5.**

**What steps should be taken to investigate the experience, perception, and meaning of the co-creation project for stakeholders?**

By formulating a stepwise plan, the research process can be interpreted in a concrete manner.

**6.**

**Which points can be used to map out change?**

Determine how change can be made transparent. Based on this, formulate a research plan, including different research methods. Discuss with participants what times are appropriate to share a questionnaire or schedule a group interview, then set the research plan in motion.

**7.**

**How do participants look back on the co-creation project?**

Did participants discover new talents in themselves, learned new skills, met new people? Do they look at the museum differently now? What do they take away from their participation into the future? The answers to these questions can provide insight into the impact of the co-creation project.

**8.**

**Are there unexpected changes? What can we learn from these?**

Unexpected topics may stand out in addition to predetermined ones. An iterative way of doing research considers this possibility. Based on data collection and analysis, adjustments can be made if necessary.

# Colophon

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