ON BOARD URBACT
Transfer Network Policy Recommendations

ON **BOARD**'s core policy recommendations to build an Educational Innovation Network were captured in a series of checklists included in the Transnational Meeting reports, where the main learning on key transfer steps was summarised.

These tips are addressed to local public authorities, the most important drivers of the Educational Innovation project in the city, and form part of **ON BOARD**'s toolbox for other cities keen on developing their own local Educational Innovation Network.

The following is for other European City Councils considering launching an Educational Innovation Network, regardless of the level of decentralisation of education competences that exists in their countries.

Build commitment around a new approach to education

- **Place Education as a political priority**. Mainstream Education so other policies and strategies developed are aware, consistent and respond to these education priorities. Consequently, foresee that the necessary funds and human resources are there to support the Educational Innovation Network entity and staff.

- **Invest time in dialogue with the education community**. Seek out the engagement of local public and private, formal and non-formal education stakeholders while acknowledging and supporting the work they already do. Visit them in their education centres, talk with them, ask about their concerns, and ultimately, adapt the new Educational Network project to their needs, capacities and expectations.

- **Facilitate educational innovation**. Support schools and headmasters to plan and perform as test beds for research (working with universities or research centres), introduce new technologies applied to education, facilitate cooperation with other non-school agents, integrate new methods for meaningful learning, and try innovative practices to, afterwards, showcase the benefits to other city education institutions.

- **Build enabling alliances and strategic links**. Seek dialogue with higher levels of government to position your city as key partner in educational innovation topics. Keep a high international profile for your city and its education policy so you can gain visibility and prestige that, in turn, can contribute to attracting even more interest and resources.

Establish the Educational Innovation Network Governance

- **Make it sustainable for the city**. Ensure the structure and governance for the Educational Innovation Network can be driven by the Council and institutionalized (embedded within the local administration). Adapt its functions so as to best respond to the city's education priorities, whether these focus on a single district with specific education needs or as a city-wide Network.

- **Make it relevant and useful for its members**. Engage and integrate private and institutional members and give them capacity to make decisions and propose initiatives that are relevant for them.

- **Define roles and responsibilities**. Establish the internal interactions and municipal services cross-borders as well as the relations with external stakeholders. Create the most appropriate workflows among all Network members. Periodically monitor the processes involved, for checking their effectivity and any possible upgrading.

- **Build the best project team**. Appoint a solid Coordination Team that engages renowned education professionals in the city together with representatives from different municipal services, ensuring their role as connectors with the different members of the education community, including non-school agents who can offer perspectives and practices that can enrich the Team and its work.

- **Find the best leadership**. The Network leader (coordinator, project manager) will be the public face and main reference person for the educational innovation community. S/he will be the catalyser of proposals and learning, and so should have both the soft and hard skills necessary to make the Network an innovation driver.

Engage local innovators for taking the first Network steps

- **Start with the city's existing know-how**. Parallel to building the Network, map the most innovative education projects to find out about the quality and diversity of the local experience. Acknowledge and incorporate this wealth of experience in a "Basket of EduProjects" to promote the exchange of Good Practices and bottom-up approaches.

- **Get the ball rolling**. Find the education leaders (ground breakers) to start getting the first innovative Pilot Projects up and running. Offer them full technical and economic support so they can dedicate time and energy for the uptake of these new projects. Prioritise projects that include some or all of the following aspects:

  - Innovative
  - Integrated and multi-stakeholder
  - Consistent and relevant for the School education project
  - Uses technological/digital solutions
  - Attractive to project participants, primarily students, but companies, civil Society, family associations, too
  - Ensures the capacity building component to motivate teachers while upgrading skills
  - Integrates gender-sensitive approaches
  - Short term impact potential to show evidence-based results

Facilitate and promote innovation

- **Encourage and facilitate upgrading skills**. Provide local schools' teaching staff with specific workshops and training to harmonize skills-building. Recognise and reward new capacities on educational innovation matters, raising the visibility of personal achievements. Likewise, consider giving innovative schools a special status so they are showcased to external audiences and recognised as Innovative Centres.

- **Support cooperation and teamwork**. Facilitate meeting spaces and exchanging times between education centres and with other local agents. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning among teachers and open the classrooms to the neighbourhood/District/City through projects with families, companies, local entities... so that students are exposed to more complex and real-life situations for the new learning they need.

- **Monitor, evaluate, improve**. Develop and agree upon a set of Educational Innovation Network indicators to measure the different kinds of impact in education-related areas. Engage different municipal services and departments in this task, so that changes can be valued and possible improvements for policy and investments can be made.

Set the basis for the Educational Innovation Network sustainability

- **Aim for a distinct and independent Educational Innovation Network**. Avoid replicating the already existing Education Councils and foresee a community of practice that is independent, creative and not subject to institutional formalities. A way to do this is to put in place a Driver Group (Steering Group) that can enjoy a strong advisory role and co-responsibility.

- **Seek external funding**. Create a well-defined fundraising strategy for the Educational Innovation Network with allocated staff and a financial plan that aligns and integrates different resources. Map your interests against the diverse and complementing funds: ESF+, ERASMUS+, Horizon Europe, ERDF, etc., creating a value chain city "picture" for integrating education initiatives. Be sure to align your sustainability efforts with wider European and international ones (UNSDGs, eg.)

- **Keep your EU radar on high alert for opportunities and be at the right fora**. Connect through social media and newsletters; select those hashtags and feeds that best suit your expectations; get to know your National Contact Points (NCPs); attend Brokerage events where other educational innovation actors participate. Network, network, network – make your vision known.

- **Appeal to real Network members' interests**. Everyone is involved for some reason or motivation. A mix of virtual and physical communication tools are crucial to keep members and other external participants in the loop. Communicating, training and learning opportunities on an ongoing basis will keep interest and motivation high. Successful projects, too, have their own rewards.

Engage and Empower Key Education Community Members in Network Activities

- **Teachers**.

  - Make the local **Educational Innovation Network the "to go to" plac**e and space for teachers, headmasters and other education professionals to meet, learn and network.
  - Facilitate **peer-to-peer learning** among teachers and provide training opportunities while rewarding upgraded and innovative skills. The isolationist structure and dispersed nature of schools -and education systems- still stands in the way of educational innovation.
  - Fully support school leaders who want to innovate. Give them the necessary **time and conditions for thinking, planning and shaping prerequisites** so that they can apply new ideas and methods in the classroom, without this contributing to work overload. Allow projects to go ahead in a testing-monitoring mode, too, without fear of failure, because all can contribute to valuable personal, professional, and organisational learning.

- **Businesses**.

  - Facilitate **companies and teachers' collaboration** through seminars, job shadowing or short summer-camps to allow each other to catch up on latest trends, take advantage of skills-building opportunities, and explore ways to address local skills gaps for jobs in demand.
  - The City can promote, acknowledge and encourage companies to engage in education initiatives, **rewarding their collaboration**, i.e. offering opportunities in local public procurement processes, reducing corporate tax rates…
  - Mediate with schools' headmasters to facilitate tech companies to work with schools performing as test beds for new educational products and devices and social innovation-inspired practices to deal with challenges affecting the community, Europe, the planet.

- **Universities**.

  - Engage the University as a community expert to **support strategic planning and impact assessment** of innovative projects and education policies.
  - Get the support of higher education entities for knowledge transfer and **lifelong learning for teachers** and other educational agents, namely the Educational Innovation Network stakeholders. Check out ways for participating together in other EC-funded initiatives.
  - Co-design and develop means so that university-based research, **anticipating future required skills**, can help upgrade school curricula. Work with the university's diverse set of expertise for assessing local companies' needs and emerging market trends. They can contribute to the City's planning for retaining and attracting talents, and also share evidence-based practices to help the City put the brakes on any brain drain.

- **Local entities and non-formal education** .

  - Open up the education centres to their immediate milieu and support collaborative relations with non-school agents in the neighbourhood and in the City. Bring **external learning environments and protagonists into the classroom** to make the school come alive.
  - Mobilise non-education local actors to participate in school projects and help connect the learning of children and youths with **real-life situations** in ways that make it more meaningful and engaging. Set up reward schemes in the city to encourage and acknowledge educational innovation projects involving local entities.
  - Create opportunities for **teachers to interact with these informal and non-formal education organisations** and help build collaborative bridges. Information spread via digital portals or catalogues and participation in education fairs and one-to-one meeting opportunities can lead to new project initiatives, or to new collaborations that add value to existing projects by getting other schools and more community entities involved.

- **Families**.

  - Ensure the Educational Innovation Network can foster collaboration and co-decisions on primary school projects, with **parents´ participation** and meaningful say in the education of their children.
  - Provide parents the opportunity to offer their own knowledge, skills and contacts to enrich and support education in the city and in their children's school. Offer them **training opportunities to support their children** in the use of technological devices and digital learning tools and platforms, for example.
  - Allocate resources (time, methods) that can **bolster teachers-parents' dialogues** with the aim of breaking down the barrier of mutual incomprehension. Avoid "one way" communication set-ups when connecting with families by ensuring "two-way" communication flows and feedback are available. Adjust school-families dialogues, factoring in the increased diversity of students' families.
  - Engage families in activities that involve other schools and the City so as to **create a sense of community**, highlighting the role of families in the holistic learning aimed for.

- **Students**.

  - Cities can enable support schemes for **students' ideas and projects** in the form of contests and challenges.
  - Education Departments can carry out **wide-spread student consultations** to understand their needs and preferences for the purposes of better understanding options for the City's education scope and direction of activities involving students.
  - **Rethink the teacher–student relationship** and consider the student as an active subject, not a passive or reactive one. Get closer to formative assessments, and move away from summative assessments, too much based on exams and marks, which is so 20th century. Group work and proactive learning raises interest and promotes student's contributions and growth, inside and outside the classroom.
  - Take into account the interests and contexts of students. **Emotional aspects have a pivotal influence in learning**, having to do with the personal situations and feelings at home and in school of each child. Educational innovation projects must have this contextual understanding at their core, we believe, and be a guide in all projects' designs and actions.