

Practical tools for

Creative Climate Action

Creative Procurement Guide for Local Authorities



30-60 min

Tool description and purpose

This guide helps local authorities work more confidently and effectively with artists in public-sector, sustainability- or citizen-focused projects. It supports you in:

- Choosing the right commissioning model (grant or procurement)
- Designing artist-friendly and goal-oriented open calls
- Building clear, fair and transparent contracts
- Creating better outcomes through mutual understanding

Who is it for?

- Local authorities such as municipal officers and regional cultural producers
- Project leads and coordinators managing artist collaborations
- Intermediaries working with public sector and creatives
- Anyone planning to commission or contract creative work with public funding

When to use this tool?

- While designing an open call, residency, or commissioned creative project
- When preparing a procurement or grant-based collaboration
- Before signing contracts with artists or creative teams
- In early planning meetings or stakeholder workshops
- When developing internal guidelines for creative collaboration

How to use this tool?

Step 1: Read through the tips

- Familiarize yourself with each thematic section:
- Purpose and outcomes
- Legal format (grant vs. procurement)
- Designing calls
- Roles and expectations
- Contracts and rights
- Risk, structure, and support
- Sharing and celebrating the results
- These are based on real-life experiences from cities and regions across the Baltic Sea region (Kotka, Skåne, Jurmala - read more from the case studies).

Step 2: Reflect on your own context

- Which tips are most relevant to your current or upcoming project?
- What aspects do you already cover? Where is there room for improvement?
- Use this tool as a planning checklist or discussion prompt with your team.

Step 3: Use examples to support your design

- Refer to real-world examples (e.g. Region Skåne's open-ended call on energy saving)
- Draw inspiration for writing better tender texts or call criteria
- Learn from tested practices on topics like IPR, citizen engagement, or payment models

Step 4: Share with others

- Use the tool in cross-departmental meetings (e.g. culture + climate + procurement)
- Share with artists or intermediaries early in the process
- Integrate selected sections into call documents or internal guides

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Tip List

Practical Tips for Local Authorities Procuring or Commissioning Creative Projects with Artists and Cultural Professionals.

1. Clarify the Strategic Purpose First

- What change do you aim to support (e.g. sustainability, behavioural shift, community engagement)?
- Elaborate why a collaboration with the artists or creatives makes sense, e.g. what these professional can bring in to the wanted change.
- Articulate this in terms that invite creativity rather than prescribing a ready solution or product.

2. Choose the Right Mechanism: Grant or Procurement?

- Grant if the goal is cultural value or experimentation.
- Procurement if you're buying a specific service or deliverable.
- If unsure, test a hybrid model (e.g. open call with negotiated scope).
- Seek guidance from legal or intermediary partners when needed.

3. Design the Call for Creativity, Not Compliance

- Use questions, not instructions in open calls:
- “How might creative processes foster mindset shifts in our community?”
- Avoid overly rigid language or bureaucratic formats – allow space for surprise.
- Collaborate with intermediaries and artists in shaping the criteria and tone of voice to be appealing and convey the opportunity.

Example from practice: Region Skåne

“We asked artists to respond to the challenge: how can cultural creatives work with energy saving? The call included open-ended questions, not specific instructions, to invite diverse approaches – for example, working with new materials, behavioural change, or participatory processes with civil society.”

– based on Region Skåne's open call model

4. Discuss Roles and Expectations Early

- Make sure everyone knows who does what:
- Who coordinates?
- Who communicates?
- Who supports documentation and visibility?
- Avoid “hidden labour” – if participation in meetings or public events is expected, plan and budget for it.

5. Respect Artistic Freedom – Define It Together

- Clearly state what outcomes are expected without limiting the creative process.
- Trust the artist's method – but align it with the public purpose.
- Artistic freedom must coexist with contract responsibilities.

6. Handle Contracts with Care and Clarity

- Use a written agreement that includes:
- Scope of work
- Timeline and milestones
- Payment schedule (e.g. 70/30 split)
- Documentation and communication expectations
- IPR terms (usage rights, visibility, crediting)
- Consider three-party contracts if an intermediary is involved.
- Be mindful of the power dynamics and ensure fair contract and terms for the creative party.

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7. Understand Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

- By default (e.g. in Sweden, Finland), the artist retains ownership.
- If you need usage rights, define scope, purpose, and duration in the contract.
- Never assume “full ownership” unless explicitly negotiated.
- Ask for guidance from the intermediary party, public art agencies or creative umbrella associations with knowledge about creative rights.

8. Use Intermediaries as Bridge Builders

- If possible, partner with intermediaries (e.g. cultural hubs, agencies) to:
- Facilitate the process
- Support artists
- Translate between sectors
- Balance the expectations to ensure smoother delivery.

9. Start Small – Learn and Iterate

- Pilot creative collaborations in low-risk formats before scaling.
- Evaluate not just the outcomes, but also process quality, expanded networks and partnerships.
- Gather feedback from diverse stakeholders in the collaboration: artists and creatives, communities, internal departments and other stakeholders.

10. Celebrate and Share

- Ensure proper public visibility for the creative work – both artist and project deserve recognition.
- Use documentation (photos, video, stories) to share outcomes with involved communities, citizens, and peers.
- Build learning into your cultural procurement practice.

