

The Leading Cities in 2026

Terms of Reference, January 2026

The programme of the [Culture Committee](#) of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) includes a support to [Leading Cities](#). It aims to support the cities with great experience in cultural rights and sustainability through activities in the fields of leadership, advocacy, communication, learning and cooperation. Leading Cities are cities with solid conceptual and practical experience as regards the place of culture in sustainable cities. As a result, they become leaders in the implementation of [Culture 21 Plus](#), the Committee's international frame for Cultural Rights and Sustainability, and public speakers in the advocacy activities of the Committee.

Leading Cities receive annual support from the Secretariat of the Committee on Culture in the following domains: "Leadership and Advocacy", "Communication" and "Cooperation and Learning". The specific forms of assistance and support to be provided to each city are designed through consultations between each city and the Secretariat of the Committee. A key element of this programme is its tailored support, designed to respond to the specific needs and demands of each Leading City.

This document presents a standard set of areas of activity which may inspire Leading Cities when identifying the areas in which they may wish to request support. Activities have been grouped under the three aforementioned domains. The Secretariat of the Culture Committee remains available to further explore the specific activities to be undertaken with each Leading City, and to provide examples of activities already implemented in other cities. Enquiries may be addressed to culture@uclg.org.

Leadership and Advocacy

Actions	Examples / Further detail
1. The political leaders of the Leading Cities represent the UCLG Committee on Culture in international meetings and at key moments of the annual programme.	<p>The Secretariat of the Committee on Culture provides timely information on key global events related to culture and sustainable cities, and asks Leading Cities for their availability to take part in them.</p> <p>Relevant examples could include the participation in UCLG World Congresses, UCLG World Council meetings, and meetings of UCLG's regional sections; or participation in other relevant international conferences (e.g. UNESCO, other UN agencies, etc.).</p>

Cooperation and Learning

Actions	Examples / Further detail
2. A self-evaluation workshop with “Culture 21 Plus”.	<p>Organisation of a “Culture 21 Lab”: an inspiring workshop (1 or 2 days) involving a diverse range of local actors to self-assess cultural rights and sustainability on the basis of Culture 21 Plus, using either the “Essentials” or the “Extended” module.</p> <p>The Lab results in a written report featuring a “radar” that depicts the city’s strengths and weaknesses. This output is translated and disseminated.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG can send an expert to facilitate/ support this exercise.</p>
3. A workshop to design new policies with “Culture 21 Plus”.	<p>Organisation of a “Culture 21 Lab”: a workshop (1 or 2 days) to design new local cultural programmes and projects based on the “Extended” module and good practices from other cities.</p> <p>The output of this workshop is a written report that includes a summary of the key ideas raised and a plan for action. This output is translated and disseminated.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG can send an expert to facilitate/ support this exercise.</p>
4. Testing new thematic modules of “Culture 21 Plus”.	<p>Culture 21 Plus stands as the most comprehensive global framework available for cities and territories to work on cultural rights and sustainable development.</p> <p>In addition to its “Extended” version (30 areas, more than 200 potential actions), Culture 21 Plus develops through specific thematic modules, which will be available for use by Leading Cities. Some of these modules do not yet exist; in fact, they will be developed and shaped through a co-creation process with our members in 2026, 2027 and 2028. The thematic modules foreseen at this stage are: climate change, gender equality, health and wellbeing, cultural heritage, rural areas and metropolitan areas. Additional thematic modules can be explored upon demand of Leading Cities. Also, a Leading City can host an international seminar to locally “test” a Culture 21 Plus module.</p> <p>The output of this workshop is a written report that includes a</p>

	<p>summary of the key ideas raised and a local plan for action, as well as a revised version of the module.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will involve experts and other Leading cities to assist / support this exercise.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will translate and disseminate the results.</p>
5. A peer-learning seminar.	<p>A Leading City can host a 3 or 4-day visit of one or several “peers” (senior staff members of another Leading City) in order to generate new knowledge and delve deeper into the topics of a specific field.</p> <p>This experience leads to a public article that explains the peer-learning experience. This outcome will be translated and disseminated. Other outputs may be considered on a case by case basis (e.g. presentations at international events, contribution to UCLG reports, etc.).</p>
6. A visit to a Leading City.	<p>A member city of the UCLG Culture Committee may wish to visit a Leading City with expertise in a specific field.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG can suggest cities with expertise in this specific field and support or prepare the agenda of the visit.</p> <p>The outputs of this activity can be public (a report documenting the visit) or remain confidential.</p>
7. A good practice.	<p>Identification, recognition and international visibility of a local good practice, through a guided process of identification and documentation using a good practice template. Tailored advice and additional assistance will be provided if necessary.</p> <p>The good practice will be later translated and disseminated in the Committee’s international repository of good practices, “the OBS”, as well as social media for further visibility.</p>
8. A “Seven Keys” workshop.	<p>A “Seven Keys” workshop (1 or 2 days) brings together diverse voices from a city, town or region, to collectively identify local challenges and cocreate locally grounded solutions through a cultural lens. Designed to facilitate the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the workshop empowers local participants on the strategic connection</p>

	<p>between the SDGs and cultural policies.</p> <p>The outputs of the workshop are: (i) an internal report with the seven local “Keys” (a draft plan of specific actions to be carried out), and (ii) a public article.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will involve experts to support this exercise.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will translate and disseminate the results internationally in the dedicated page to the Seven Keys.</p>
9. AI and the cultural policies	<p>The use of artificial Intelligence in public policies is a fact, and it will grow in the coming years. The brand-new Culture 21 Plus can provide to cities, towns and regions with a frame for an ethical use of AI in the cultural policies, programmes and projects.</p> <p>In 2026, the Culture Committee will analyse the current impact of IA on cultural policies of cities, towns and regions, and discuss with members if tailored advice, capacity-building or peer-learning are feasible.</p>
10. Testing the targets and indicators of the Culture 2030 Goal campaign.	<p>The Culture Committee of UCLG is one of the members of the Culture 2030 Goal campaign, which released a draft proposal for a Culture Goal: “The Culture Goal: from Necessity to Reality” for the UN post-2030 Agenda.</p> <p>A Leading City can work to test the local feasibility of the 10 specific targets and various indicators of the Culture Goal, using them to monitor and measure progress in local cultural policy. This work is jointly realised by the municipal teams in charge of (at least) Culture and the 2030 Agenda.</p> <p>The output of this work is a written report that makes evidence of the local commitment of the international advocacy for a Culture Goal, and provides recommendations to further strengthen culture in local strategies around the SDGs.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will involve experts and other Leading cities to assist / support this exercise.</p> <p>The Committee on Culture of UCLG will translate and disseminate the results internationally, including in the context of the Culture 2030</p>

	Goal campaign reports and advocacy activities.
11. A Leading City addressing a “challenge”.	<p>A Leading City can request support from the UCLG Culture Committee to explore a complex issue or a “local challenge on cultural policy” through the involvement of members and/or relevant experts of the Committee.</p> <p>This local challenge may be narrowly defined (focusing on a very specific theme in the cultural policy of the city) or broader in scope (namely, the design of appropriate governance for culture, participative policymaking, or a local cultural strategy).</p> <p>The outputs of this activity can be public or remain confidential.</p>
12. A public event on the cultural policies of the city.	<p>A Leading City can request conceptual expertise and strategic advice in the context of preparations for relevant public events on cultural policies and other fields falling within the scope of Culture 21 Plus.</p> <p>If relevant, other representatives of the UCLG Committee on Culture could also be mobilised to attend the event.</p>

Communication

Actions	Examples / Further detail
13. Dedicated page for Leading Cities in the website of the Committee.	<p>Personalised pages for each Leading City are a global showcase for their relevant policy documents, good practices, videos and other resources related to Culture 21 Plus.</p> <p>See examples of Leading Cities on the Agenda 21 for culture’s website.</p>
14. Visibility of Leading Cities good practices	<p>The good practices of Leading Cities periodically appear on the Committee’s website and its dissemination channels, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The presentation personalised banners of these good practices in the home page of the Committee’s website. - Dissemination of these good practices on social media (IG, X, LinkedIn). - Inclusion of Leading Cities’ good practices in the Committee’s bimonthly newsletter.
15. Personalised Leading City	A dedicated logo with the name of each Leading City is produced,

logo.	which can be used in public documents and communication channels.
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Please note that this document presents a standard set of areas of activity. It is a shared framework. Its aim is to inspire Leading Cities in designing their own tailored programme that responds to the specific priorities, ambitions and contexts of each city.

A tailored programme and a detailed budget are elaborated for each city participating in the programme. This is formalised through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding or a Convention.

Leading Cities are advised to remain as such for a minimum period of two years. This timeframe allows for continuity and the achievement of meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

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ANNEX: the 6 fields and 30 areas of Culture 21 Plus

