

JUST. BE. YOUNG.

The application of Leeuwarden and the 35 surrounding villages for European Youth Capital 2028



Among the many who helped shape our bid:

Kiki (14), Vince (12), Jare (14), Riley (13), Naomi (13), Ralph (13), Avery (12), Dounia (15), Matilda (16), Giantelly (15), Amber (20), Lotte (17), Jildou (16), Santana (20), Joeri (19), Vera (23), Geriet (20), Karst (13), Timo (12), Lilly (24), Francesco (23), Feline (25), Theo (26), Pia (27), Beatry (22), Daniel (27), Sham (18), Siver (17), Niek (14), Irene (21)

"When I first set foot in Leeuwarden, I was instantly mesmerised. It had everything I'd been missing back home; clean air, green spaces, a welcoming vibe, and good transport infrastructure. That was my first impression. Now, as I near the end of my second year at university, those feelings have only grown stronger. I've gotten to know a Leeuwarden that's vibrant, energetic, and full of opportunities for learning, sports, and fun. When I applied to be editor-in-chief for this questionnaire, it felt like the perfect way to give back to the community that's given me so much. I wrote it with both an open heart and a critical eye, trying

to capture how young people in and around Leeuwarden see their region. And I wasn't alone. Many other youngsters helped shape this document, whether by sharing ideas, reviewing drafts, giving feedback, co-writing the initial bid, etc. I hope this questionnaire helps you see Leeuwarden through our eyes; with its challenges and opportunities, and a shared focus on constant improvement and meaningful youth participation."

- Mihai Cășălean, 20 years old, international student at NHL Stenden University in Leeuwarden, from Romania

European Youth Forum Bank Details

Name of bank	ING bank Marnix Business Branch
Address of bank	1, rue du Trône 1000 BRUXELLES BELGIUM
SWIFT or BIC code	BBRUBEBB
Account number	375-1009152-43
IBAN	BE66 3751 0091 5243

Applicant invoicing details

Name of entity to be invoiced	Gemeente Leeuwarden
Legal address	Oldehoofsterkerkhof 2, 8900 JA Leeuwarden
Registration number	
VAT number (if applicable)	
Your reference (if applicable)	NL22ZZZ500426880000
Contact person	

European Youth Capital (EYC) 2028 first round application form

A. Applicant

Municipality	Gemeente Leeuwarden
Region	Friesland
State	
Total population	130.011 (1/1/2025)
Population under 35 years old	57.170 (1/1/2025)
Website EYC	https://www.lwdforeyc.nl/en

B. Municipal legal representative

Surname	Van Haersma Buma			
First name	Sybrand			
Position	Mayor of Leeuwarden			
Address	Oldehoofsterkerkhof 2	8900 JA	Leeuwarden	Friesland
Phone	+31582338888			
E-mail	secretariaat.burgemeester@leeuwarden.nl			
	Municipal Service Coordinator			
Surname	Metselaar			
First name	Karen			
Position	Project lead			
Address	Oldehoofsterkerkhof 2	8900 JA	Leeuwarden	Friesland
Phone				
E-mail				
Webpage of the city	https://www.leeuwarden.nl/			

C. Supporting Youth Structure(s)

Name of organisation	Tienskip			
Address of organisation	Snekertrekweg 1	8912AA	Leeuwarden	Friesland
Phone	+3158 230 0669			
E-mail	info@tienskip.nl			
Web page	https://www.tienskip.nl			
	Contact person			
Surname	[REDACTED]			
First name	[REDACTED]			
Position	Initiator			
Address	Snekertrekweg 1	8912AA	Leeuwarden	Friesland
Phone	[REDACTED]			
E-mail	[REDACTED]			

This bid is supported by 100 organisations and cities.



I hope LEYC2028 will

Be home

Be safe

Be an example to follow

Inspire the new generation

Be young

Be a place of change

Be a place of sharing and acceptance

- Federica (International student in Leeuwarden and one of the writers of bid 1)

4. Hosting infrastructure

Rooted in a culture of resilience and individuality, Leeuwarden is ready to connect. Our city was born from the uniting of mounds by our ancestors, and with that same spirit, our hosting infrastructure is designed to host a European Youth Capital year that builds bridges between people, places and perspectives. Leeuwarden is a welcoming and accessible city that places a strong emphasis on inclusion, hospitality, and the well-being of its residents and visitors. Initiatives such as the 'Iepen Húske' campaign, in which hospitality entrepreneurs open their toilets free of charge to the public, reflect the city's open, community-minded spirit and commitment to accessibility in everyday life. This atmosphere makes Leeuwarden a pleasant place to visit.

Reaching the city and accommodation

Leeuwarden is easily accessible from across Europe via multiple modes of transport. Most notably, the city is just two hours away by train from Schiphol Airport, Europe's fourth largest, which offers direct flights to 171 European destinations. Closer to Leeuwarden is Groningen Eelde Airport, approximately 52 kilometres away. From there, the city can be reached by train or bus. Train travel is one of the most efficient ways to reach Leeuwarden. On average, a single ticket to Leeuwarden costs up to €35 in second class, with various discounts available, including group and off peak fares. By car, Leeuwarden is accessible via the **A31**, **A32** and **N31** motorways and we will facilitate carpooling opportunities for international visitors. The city is also highly bicycle friendly, featuring an extensive network of dedicated cycling paths and free bicycle parking at multiple locations.

Once here, Leeuwarden offers a variety of hotels catering to different preferences and budgets with over 1,000 beds available. Room prices vary widely, from €57 to €179 per night, depending primarily on amenities and location. Many hotels provide wheelchair accessible rooms, lifts, and accessible bathrooms to accommodate guests with mobility challenges.

Transport in the city

Leeuwarden offers sustainable and convenient transport options, including buses, taxis, (rental) boats, shared scooters, and (rental) bicycles. At the same time, the city is compact and highly walkable, with most destinations reachable within a 30-minute walk or a 10-minute bike ride. Our focus on walking and cycling also supports inclusive mobility, with well-maintained pavements accessible for people using wheelchairs, walkers, mobility scooters, or other assistive devices and tactile paving guiding people with visual impairments. Walking and cycling are also the most affordable ways to get around, which is important since Dutch public transport can be costly for international young visitors. As part of our LEYC ambitions, we will explore ways to make local buses cheaper and support carpool initiatives, ensuring mobility is sustainable and accessible.

Working facilities

Leeuwarden offers a diverse range of well-equipped venues and sports facilities (also accessible for people with disabilities), making it an ideal location for a wide variety of activities.

- Cultural venues like 'Neushoorn' which is both an educational location as well as a music venue.
- Sports facilities: stadium, ice rinks, and skateparks. The largest example is 'Kooi stadion', the new soccer stadium.
- Parks and recreation areas like 'de Prinsentuin' which is a beautiful park in the centre of the city.
- Youth meeting spaces, where young people take partial responsibility for management and organizing activities. An example is 'Moody's', which is run by youth workers from Amaryllis, the city's social support organization.
- Outdoor event locations for festivals, such as 'de Groene Ster', a large green recreational area on the eastern side of Leeuwarden with lakes, beaches, forests and walking trails.

The sports facilities can house up to 30,000 seats. Cultural venues offer over 4,725 seats and outdoor event locations can house another 30,000 people. This in addition to smaller youth meeting spaces for groups between 10 and 250 people.

Sustainability in accommodation and transport

Leeuwarden is actively working towards sustainability across its accommodation and transport facilities. The city is committed to becoming climate-neutral and achieving a fully circular economy by 2050. Efforts include waste minimisation, grants for energy efficient appliances, and greening of our city. These actions are already bearing fruit; the province of Friesland, of which Leeuwarden is the capital, was recently recognised as one of the leading global regions for a circular economy in the Circularity Gap Report Friesland ([PDF CGR Friesland - content](#), 2025).

These ambitions are reflected in our accommodation and transport facilities. For example, the Notiz Hotel, which is run by NHL Stenden University's hospitality students, offers locally sourced, organic meals at its restaurant. Secondly, Leeuwarden is increasing space for walking and cycling throughout the city and offers numerous sustainable transport options such as electric public buses, taxis, shared scooters and bicycles. All contributing to a clean and healthy urban environment.

Reinforcements of the city's current capacity

Over a thousand organisations, municipalities, schools, NGOs, festivals, cultural venues and many more have already come together to collectively deliver a European Capital of Culture in 2018, which was named Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 (LF2018). A testament to Leeuwarden's highly effective processes is the visit of the Giants by Royal De Luxe, when over 450,000 people visited the city over three days. Large-scale international conferences, such as the International Society for Performing Arts, were also hosted. After 2018, the city was left with a mature infrastructure capable of meeting the requirements of a European Youth Capital.

5. Information on the applicant city

Leeuwarden is a small city (just over 130.000 inhabitants) in the north of the Netherlands, nestled in the rural province of Friesland (Fryslân). Located about 140 kilometres north of Amsterdam and just 30 kilometres from the Wadden Sea, which connects to the North Sea. Water has long been a core part of our identity. In earlier times, Leeuwarden was directly bordered by the 'Middle Sea', which has since silted up. To be protected from the tides of the sea, inhabitants of the region lived on artificial mounds or 'terpen' in our native Frisian language. The legacy of this '*terpen*culture' is deeply embedded in our landscape and our way of living. Many villages owe their location to the presence of a terp and the city of Leeuwarden emerged through the union of three terpen. Leeuwarden is more than just a city; it is connected to 35 villages that are part of the municipality. One of Leeuwarden's most striking landmarks is the Oldehove, a leaning tower reminiscent of its Italian counterpart, the renowned Tower of Pisa. The tower's name traces back to one of the three original terpen from which Leeuwarden developed. Importantly, Leeuwarden's very name captures our heritage, as it is formed by two old Germanic words 'Lee' and 'Warde' meaning 'sheltered mound'.

The terpen (mounds) are not only present in our landscape, but also illustrate our culture. A cornerstone of Leeuwarden's identity is our strong individuality, or stubbornness. We take immense pride in our culture, languages, and traditions, which have been shaped by centuries of resilience and self-reliance. In Leeuwarden, we just like to do it a little bit differently. While this mindset has helped us preserve what is uniquely ours, it has also made it harder to step confidently onto the European stage for young people. Through our LEYC adventure, we aim to open up. To encourage young people to leave their terp, explore new perspectives, and connect with others across the city, the region, and Europe.



The step towards European connection requires ambition as well as the right tools and many young people in Leeuwarden already have a strong foundation. English is widely spoken among youth, lowering the threshold for international communication and collaboration. Leeuwarden is a multilingual city where Dutch, Frisian, and the local dialect "Liiwarders" coexist with languages such as Papiamentu, Arabic, Turkish, and Ukrainian. This

linguistic richness reflects the diverse backgrounds of our residents, including international students and young people with migration roots. It creates a fertile ground for intercultural dialogue and a natural openness to Europe. This diversity in language is a key component of why Leeuwarden is Unesco City of Literature. Our task now is to turn this quality into more and deeper connections across our community and Europe.

The youth of Leeuwarden

Leeuwarden is home to approximately 30,000 local young people aged 12 to 27 (24% of the city's population) and also serves as a regional hub for students, school children, working youth and leisure activities. Specifically, over 31,000 young people study in the city. Among them, around 2,500 international students are supported by the International Student Association (ISA). Altogether, more than 50,000 young people are connected to Leeuwarden through living, working, studying or enjoying leisure activities. This population is served by around 50 primary schools (in January 2026, an international primary school will be added), and 19 secondary schools offering special needs education, VMBO (pre-vocational), HAVO (senior general) and VWO (pre-university) tracks. Additionally, Leeuwarden is home to 8 higher education institutions which offer all main educational routes.

Our future, our policy

Leeuwarden has vast experience with the implementation of youth policies. The leading youth strategy that guides our policies and initiatives is the Youth Agenda 2024-2028, whose foundation is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Youth Agenda sets out a clear ambition: all young people, from -9 months to 27 years old, grow up in a safe environment, free from poverty, where they can develop themselves, be who they are, and have their talents and potential recognised. It focuses on improving young people's daily lives by building a strong social foundation, making education more inclusive, and ensuring accessible youth care. Building this strong social foundation requires meeting several fundamental conditions, such as assessing the social needs of each neighbourhood (city and all villages), enhancing youth influence on policy, and promoting democratic citizenship in relation to the Youth Agenda.

The agenda thus not only outlines a comprehensive, long-term vision for improving the wellbeing of young people, but also initiates concrete steps towards youth participation in policy-making and implementation. Young people were directly involved in the development of the Youth Agenda 2024-2028, working alongside a strategic network of local education and welfare partners (LEJA). It started expanding young leadership opportunities, such as the role of Children's Mayor, so young voices are not just heard but empowered. Lastly, to make the Youth Agenda more accessible, a shorter 'youth version' was created, offering a clear overview of what the city provides for young people and how it plans to address current challenges. Despite these efforts, youth participation poses several challenges. That is why a structured approach to organising sustainable youth participation is essential. The Youth Agenda outlines two key actions to realise this: our candidacy for European Youth Capital, and the sustainable engagement of young people in the agenda's implementation. Through collaboration with local organisations, we aim to involve a diverse group of young people and use our EYC candidacy as a catalyst to further strengthen youth participation.

Next to youth participation, the municipality invests in preventive services that offer early support to help avoid future problems such as school dropout, social isolation, and mental health issues. Youth workers engage young people where they naturally gather: at school, in neighbourhoods, online, and in public spaces. An important example of this preventive strategy is the recognised method "School as a Key Location". Rather than waiting for problems to surface, this methodology positions schools as vital environments for early detection and support. Moreover, OKO ("Opgroeien in een Kansrijke Omgeving", or "Growing up in a Promising Environment") is a data-driven, community-based prevention approach, designed to promote healthy and happy youth by strengthening protective factors in environments such as home, school, peer groups and leisure time. Through this initiative, Leeuwarden collaborates with local partners to monitor youth well-being, discuss findings, co-develop policy and implement sustainable initiatives focused on prevention together with youth.

European Alignment

The goals outlined in Leeuwarden's Youth Agenda 2024–2028 closely align with the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, particularly in areas such as inclusivity (Youth Goals #2 and #3), mental wellbeing (Youth Goal #5), youth participation (Youth Goal #9), cross-sector collaboration (Youth Goal #11), and the creation of a youth-friendly version of the policy document (Youth Goal #4). While we are proud of the progress made, we recognise that there is still need for growth. Through the European Youth Capital process, we aim to build on these foundations by, for example, strengthening connections with European youth organisations, as encouraged by Youth Goal #11, and by placing greater emphasis on supporting the potential of young people in our rural region, in line with Youth Goal #6.

To elaborate, in line with Youth Goal #3 of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, we want to ensure the inclusion of all young people in Leeuwarder society. Long-term initiatives such as *LWD East* address intergenerational poverty by improving prospects (especially for children and youth) in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, supported by programmes like the 'Rich Schoolday', which expands opportunities in sports, culture and learning. At the same time, inclusivity is embedded in municipal policies: the Inclusion Agenda (2024–2026), the Rainbow Programme (2024–2027) for LGBTQ+ rights, driving anti-discrimination campaigns and inclusive practices in schools and workplaces. We also follow the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Dutch principle of NOOZO (Nothing About Us, Without Us), ensuring accessibility and participation of young people with disabilities are embedded in the design, implementation and evaluation of LEYC2028. These frameworks provide the foundation for LEYC2028 to be not just a celebratory year, but a step forward in making Leeuwarden a city where all young people can thrive.

Partners

To achieve a lasting impact, we rely on strategic partnerships at the regional, national and European levels. Regionally, over 90 organisations working with youth, such as Amaryllis, LAB058, Moody's, @ease and MDT Friesland, play an essential role in this landscape. They are joined by a broader regional and national network of youth-centred partners such as Arcadia, Keunstwurk, Friesland Pop, Sport Fryslân, and the Dutch Youth Council. A standout youth-driven example is Tienskip, a local youth organisation bringing European values to life by engaging young people in democratic processes. The organisation reaches out to youth from diverse backgrounds through interactive school events where they discuss pressing social issues, collaborate on solutions, and learn how to make a real impact within democratic systems. Tienskip was recently awarded the national 'Gemeentedelers' (Municipal Best Practice) prize, recognising its approach as a national model for youth engagement in democracy. The organisation reaches approximately 2,000 young people in Leeuwarden, 5,000 in the province of Fryslân, and 10,000 across the Netherlands (plus 250 young volunteers).

The city also maintains strong national connections, with active involvement in networks such as the G40 (the biggest 40 municipalities of the Netherlands) and VNG (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten - Association of Dutch Municipalities). Our alderman for Youth and Education plays a key role nationally as a member of the VNG board and chairman of the VNG committee 'care, youth and education'. Moreover, Leeuwarden has a vast European network due to our participation in networks and funding programmes. As part of the LEYC process, Leeuwarden has started forming strategic partnerships with former European Youth Capitals such as Ghent (Belgium) and Cluj-Napoca (Romania) through initiatives like CERV Child and URBACT. Our university of applied sciences, NHL Stenden, also strengthens these links as a member of the RUN-EU (Regional University Network, European University) network. These collaborations enable mutual learning and shared innovation. Next to this, we are working together with, for example, children's rights organisation UNICEF Netherlands within their Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) to organise a large participation meeting on youth participation.

From challenges to participation

Even though we are working hard to improve the wellbeing of young people in our municipality, they continue to face significant challenges. Many still feel they must leave Leeuwarden for opportunities in the larger cities

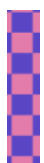
in the West. We want to change this perception by proving Leeuwarden is a city of opportunities where young people can truly thrive.

As part of our EYC candidacy, we conducted a broad consultation and participation process to map the current realities for young people. This included desk research, surveys, meetings, a school tour and in-depth conversations across the municipality with over 1,600 young people that have directly contributed. The main challenges identified were:

- **Increasing mental health issues:** 43% of young people in Friesland report feeling stressed and insufficiently resilient. Especially among girls, with 59% experiencing these challenges.
- **Insufficient accessible sports facilities:** 43% of young people in Friesland feel they sport less than they would like.
- **High poverty rates:** in Leeuwarden, 4,4% of young people grow up in poverty, while the national average is 3,6%.
- **A lack of general youth activities and spaces:** 58% of young people in Friesland feel there are not enough meeting places for young people.
- **Difficulty in buying a home.**
- **Safety concerns:** including harassment and crime.
- **Struggles with social media use:** with many youth seeking more meaningful offline connections.

We believe tackling these challenges starts with youth participation. Youth participation in policy making has always been important for our city, and it has gained even more momentum in recent years. In the coming years, demographic pressure on young people will increase. With an ageing population, young people will form a smaller minority in our city. This makes it all the more important to ensure their voices are heard. At the same time, we see trust in institutions and democracy is declining across Europe, a trend also visible in Leeuwarden.

These trends underline once more why youth participation is essential for Leeuwarden. This urgency has also been recognised by our city council, which adopted a motion on sustainable youth participation and launched a democratic innovation programme. As a result, youth participation is a cornerstone in our Youth Agenda. It forms the foundation of this bid and our EYC year. We are committed to involve a diverse range of young people through collaboration with local organisations, schools, youth initiatives and informal networks. While our municipality does not yet have a fully integrated participation structure, we see our EYC application as a catalyst to test and embed lasting participatory structures. By doing so, we contribute to Leeuwarden's and Europe's journey towards more inclusive and youth-driven societies.

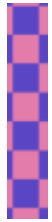


Note from the editor of bid 2: “Leeuwarden feels like a very big village, where everybody knows everybody. Every day I walk or cycle through the city, I run into at least five colleagues or friends and end up having conversations with them. Mind you, I used to be incredibly shy as a teenager. Now, I’m as extroverted as I can be, all thanks to Leeuwarden.” - Mihai Cășălean, 20 years old

6. Motivation

In Leeuwarden, ‘terpen’ are more than just mounds of earth that safeguarded Frisians in the pre-dike-period from the raging sea. They are part of our culture. The terpen are safe places, but they also separate us. We believe young people should have the opportunity to step off their ‘terp’ and meet each other on equal ground. This change starts here. It means creating an equal playing field between young people and decision-makers, between neighbourhoods, between generations, and between communities that may differ in size, visibility or background. We also want to strengthen the relationships between the municipality of Leeuwarden and the youth organisations we contain and between the youth of Leeuwarden and Europe. We believe our real power comes from working together across the region and to expand this beyond our borders. We are eager to share what we learn, and to draw inspiration from other European cities who face similar challenges focused on youth. Such meaningful exchanges will lead to lasting partnerships and mutual growth.

We see our EYC candidacy as both a catalyst and a ground for experimentation. It is a way to accelerate the positive work that is already happening and build on what exists. At the same time, it is a space where we can try out new approaches that focus on youth empowerment and participation. Our bid for European Youth Capital 2028 builds on this vision and is a means to achieve it, working to strengthen youth voices in policy, enhance collaboration, and drive systemic change. From a youth platform to dialogue events, we let young ideas, voices and leadership guide this journey. We want to offer them the freedom and the tools to shape the future of their city and their place in Europe, and to be able to **Just. Be. Young.**



Note from the editor of bid 3: *“These beautiful-sounding words truly have been the core since the very beginning of the LEYC process. In fact, as I write this during the final editing of this bid, I do so as a 24-year-old project team member and editor for LEYC. While doing an internship at the municipality, I showed my interest in the project and now I am here. Young people have much more to offer than older generations realise, and LEYC gives us the opportunity to demonstrate this. From me now, to hopefully all young people in Leeuwarden”. - Else Hofstra, 24 years old*

“Now it’s our turn”

The first spark for Leeuwarden’s European Youth Capital (LEYC) ambition was ignited at the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) legacy meeting in 2018, when young attendees declared: “Now it’s our turn to lead”.

Inspired by the momentum of Leeuwarden’s ECoC year and supported by various youth organisations and local schools and universities, young people began mobilising. The municipality embraced their energy in 2023, appointing a project leader and committing to a questionnaire and bid that would be co-created with youth.

Target group

In this bid, we often speak of empowering young people in Leeuwarden, but who exactly are we referring to? The target group of our LEYC programme is all young people aged 12 to 27 who are connected to Leeuwarden, whether through living, studying, working or spending their free time. This age range aligns with the one captured in our Youth Agenda and local initiatives such as *LWD East*. It reflects our commitment to offering continuous support from secondary education to sustainable employment. That said, this age range is not a hard limit. For example, our programme elements also focus on young professionals up to 35 years old. They can be involved through work opportunities, volunteering and peer-to-peer roles. Likewise, several 10 year olds have already provided input for the programme, knowing they will be within the age range by 2028. Within this broad framework, we pay particular attention to specific target groups who might need a bit more to step off their ‘terp’ and connect with other youth and LEYC:

- **Urban and rural youth:** While the city is an important hub, Leeuwarden also includes 35 surrounding villages. We are committed to ensuring that the LEYC programme reaches and resonates with young people in both urban and rural areas.
- **Newcomers:** Whether they are refugees, international students, or labour migrants, newcomers are an essential part of our community. We aim to create spaces where all young people can contribute, connect, and build a future in Leeuwarden.
- **Young people experiencing poverty:** We are particularly attentive to the needs of young people growing up in financially challenging circumstances. Their voices, opportunities, and access to the programme are priorities for the municipality and partners.
- **The ‘unseen’ youth:** Some young people remain invisible in public life, such as boys who spend much of their time isolated at home, girls and young women who do not feel safe or welcome in public spaces, or youth belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community, which is an extra-vulnerable group. We want to reach, hear, and support these young people.
- **Young people in vulnerable situations:** This includes school leavers, young people living with disabilities, and those supported by youth care services. These groups often face systemic barriers and deserve special attention to ensure full inclusion and participation.

By focusing on these groups, we aim to make LEYC2028 a year of visibility, opportunity, and genuine empowerment for all young people.

A youth-driven bid

This application is the product of deep collaboration between young people, the municipality, and the collaborating partners. Over 1,600 young people contributed directly through research, workshops, creative sessions, and surveys. Partly on the basis of earlier research and partly specifically for the LEYC process. For the first application round, a group of ten young people drafted the bid's foundation during an intensive two day "pressure cooker" session. In this session, they expanded the results of surveys, desk research and gatherings towards a foundation of bid 1, supported by a facilitator from our partner Keunstwurk and backed by the municipality.



Then, the second round bid application was written by Mihai Cășălean, a 20-year-old editor-in-chief who was selected through an open application process, including a cover letter and CV. He worked in close collaboration with the municipality and partner organisations to craft an application accurately reflecting the current realities and ambitions of Leeuwarden. The position was paid, and the writer signed a formal contract to ensure accountability and quality, as well as to reinforce the principle of meaningful, professional youth participation.

This final bid was edited by Else Hofstra, a 24-year-old fulltime employee within the European Youth Capital project since July 2025. Throughout the whole process, the bid was refined through feedback from youth groups, municipal departments, and partners, but always with the young editor-in-chief at the centre.



Not to forget, all the visuals in this bid were brought to life by Fenne, a talented 19-year-old student in media design who was hired to create them. This approach exemplifies the very ethos Leeuwarden advocates: youth-led processes that renew democracy and place young people in positions where they can make a change.

The three core themes

LEYC's guiding ethos, coined by a young participant at one of our sessions, is deceptively simple: **Just. Be. Young.** It not only encapsulates an invitation to young people to grab power, it is also a declaration that being who you are is enough. Young people should feel free from pressure, full of potential, and able to participate at one's own pace. More than just being a slogan, Just. Be. Young. is our blueprint for transformation. The words in our ethos each lead to one of our main themes. These themes didn't emerge by chance. A wide range of co-creation activities informed this process, from the 'Tienskipdagen' sessions with over 850 students from various schools, to targeted meet-ups with student associations, sports clubs, and cultural organisations. They are the result of aligning the local challenges identified with the broader framework of the EU Youth Goals.



Just. → Equity

Fairness, justice, and structural inclusion, removing barriers through equal access, policy reform, and engagement with social justice movements.



Be. → Sense of Belonging

Identity, connection, and participation, creating physical and mental spaces for shared experiences, cultural expression, and collective creativity.



Young. → Vitality

Health, vibrancy, and resilience, promoting mental and physical well-being in nurturing, sustainable environments.

Equity revolves all around equal opportunities. We want every young person to have the chance to be seen, heard, and valued. Everyone should be able to develop their talents and participate fully, regardless of where they were born or what their background is. This theme is deeply connected to the guiding principle of *empowerment* from the EU Youth Strategy. Similarly, this theme aligns strongly with European Youth Goals

#2, #3, #6 and #9 which all focus on *inclusivity*, and *equal rights* of any young person, whatever gender or heritage they may have. By creating spaces where all young people are seen, heard, and valued, we aim to empower them to fully participate in shaping their futures.



Outcome: all young people feel respected, trusted, and able to participate meaningfully in governance. This translates into young people having an increased sense of confidence regarding their own future, finding a job, finding a home, and achieving a happy life compared to 2023. Young people are no longer passive participants, but recognised as co-creators of an inclusive and sustainable urban society. This outcome positions Leeuwarden as a model city for sustainable, youth-led development across Europe.

Sense of Belonging focuses on making sure every young person feels they are part of something, they belong, there is a place for them, and they matter. With this theme, we aim to create spaces and networks where all young people feel at home. Not only in their neighbourhood or in Leeuwarden, but also in Friesland, in the Netherlands, and in Europe. Young people will for example get opportunities to participate in exchanges (Erasmus+), trips (DiscoverEU) international projects, and civic initiatives. This theme supports the guiding principle of *connect* from the EU Youth Strategy and reflects Youth Goal #1: *Connecting EU with Youth*.



Outcome: young people feel connected to each other and their communities in both the city and its villages, and are engaged in civic life locally and across Europe. As a result, we expect a 5% increase in the number of young people who intend to stay in their neighbourhood or village compared to 2023, leading to more young people contributing their talents to the city. Belonging strengthens both the social and economic future of our region.

Vitality means more than just health. It means having the energy, confidence, and support to grow, contribute, and feel fully alive. With this theme, we want to create the conditions allowing every young person in Leeuwarden to thrive. A vital young population is one that shapes its city, cares for its environment, and drives change. That is why this theme connects health and wellbeing to youth leadership, civic engagement, and environmental activism. This theme supports guiding principles *engagement* and *empowerment* from the EU Youth Strategy. It aligns with Youth Goal #5 (*Mental Health and Wellbeing*) and Youth Goal #10 (*Sustainable Green Europe*), as well as the European Commission's 2023 focus on community-based mental health support and prevention.



Outcome: young people assess their mental and physical health better compared to 2023. As a result they are more resilient and more engaged. They have access to inclusive support systems and opportunities for environmental and climate activism.

Long-term goals

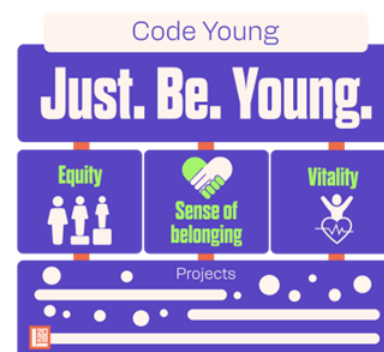
By following the goals of these themes, Leeuwarden will be recognised as one of Europe's leading youth-driven cities by 2028. Young people here take ownership of their wellbeing, shape inclusive communities, and create systemic change. To achieve this, the municipality has:

- Embedded youth voices structurally in decision-making.
- Developed inclusive spaces across urban and rural areas.
- Launched youth-led cultural programmes and intergenerational dialogues.
- Formalised youth participation through Code Young.
- Built more youth-focused European partnerships, for example via Erasmus+, CERV Child, and URBACT.

All together, our themes focus on connecting our *terpenculture* where needed so that every young person has an equal chance to stand tall. We are building a future shaped with and by youth, from the Frisian terp to the European stage, so all youth can **Just. Be. Young.**!

7. European Youth Capital Programme

With our vision in place, we now shift to action. With Code Young as our foundation, our programme proposal translates our ethos Just. Be. Young. into concrete projects. Guided by the themes Sense of Belonging, Vitality and Equity, we present a year-long programme designed to include and make a difference. Most importantly, it is a programme where young people are the starting point, the driving force and the ultimate outcome. This is how we will bring the European Youth Capital year to life in Leeuwarden.



The foundation: Code Young

In this application, youth participation is the foundation for our themes. Leeuwarden's candidacy for European Youth Capital 2028 is built on the ethos of Just. Be. Young. This is more than a slogan; it reflects our belief that young people should not simply be invited in but trusted to lead. From the start, our bid has been written, shaped and reviewed by young people and the programme has been directed, co-created or developed based on input, ideas and direct advice from young people across the municipality. In total, 3,000 young people have contributed to the LEYC process. So when you read about societal hackathons, gamified budgeting workshops, or a rooftop festival, these are not proposals made for youth but with them. Youth participation is not an add-on to this bid, it is the core and Code Young is our means of achieving this.

Therefore, we have partnered with Tienskip, a local youth organisation with years of experience to bridge the gap between young people and democracy. Together, we developed **Code Young**: a structured framework and quality label for high-standard youth participation. Code Young does not only function as a guideline, but as a tool to make youth participation visible and transparent. It offers a clear path for any organisation or government who wants to ensure young people are justly included. Once all four phases are followed, the project receives the Code Young label, giving credibility to its participatory foundation. With Code Young, we explicitly aim to ensure organisations consistently work towards the three highest levels of Arnstein's participation ladder, where young people have real control and decision-making power. This approach is aligned with the 5 pillars of the EU Youth Test and the key principles for youth participation developed by the Dutch National Youth Council (NJR). Through Code Young, we bring these principles into practice. We are still learning and implementing as well but strive to apply Code Young in all the aspects of LEYC by 2028.

Four phases of Code Young

Beginning phase	Define the framework in which young people can engage, and determine which areas they will (and want to) be involved in. A decision tree and supporting materials are provided to help guide this process.
Outreach phase	Plan how to reach a diverse group of young people and gather their input. Tools such as the Participation Agenda ¹ are used to ensure comprehensive planning and inclusive outreach.
Decision phase	A key aspect of Code Young is including young people in actual decision-making. To support this, organisations are encouraged to use Tienskip's hourglass method ² , which structures participatory decision-making in an effective and transparent way.
Securing phase	This phase focuses on traceability and accountability, clearly showing young people how their input has influenced decisions and where their ideas have been implemented.

¹The Participation Agenda is an overview of the wide-range of events and activities within the municipality of Leeuwarden where young people will be present and it thus provides suitable moments for participation.

²The hourglass method is a participatory approach where input is first gathered from a broad and diverse group of young people. This input is then narrowed down and used to develop concrete ideas or policies. Finally, the outcomes are tested and refined by returning to a wide group of young people to ensure alignment with their needs and perspectives.

Code Young in the development of this bid

From the beginning, we believed young people should be involved in shaping a year that is meant for them. So, we launched an inclusive process, starting with broad outreach through surveys, consultations and interviews. Then, this input was processed by a smaller group of young people and written down in the different versions of the bid. Drafts were shared for feedback and meetings allowed ideas to be discussed, while showing youth how their feedback was used.

Simultaneously, Code Young informs our programme: the open programme is a perfect example of youth shaping and controlling the entire programme, while the partner programme invites and supports organisations to contribute to LEYC2028 in alignment with Code Young's principles. The curated programme, which has so far focused on gathering youth input, will progressively move up the participation ladder in the preparation years (see Chapter 10). Developed alongside Code Young and shaping its process, this bid is a living example of what Code Young entails. We will keep developing Code Young as it's being implemented on a wider scale.

Beyond the bid, Code Young will play a structural role in how youth participation is embedded throughout our LEYC programme. Most importantly, from 2027, Code Young will be formally integrated into municipal policy processes and decision-making, ensuring sustainable youth participation. From 2028 onwards, 100% of all policies (also) concerning youth will be developed based on youth participation in accordance with Code Young. This will be a lasting legacy of our European Youth Capital year. Developed locally but designed for broader relevance, it offers a clear, practical framework for embedding meaningful youth participation in policy and decision-making. During the LEYC year, we will actively share and promote Code Young as a good practice through European partnerships, open-source tools, and peer learning. It can contribute to a broader European movement of valuable, inclusive youth participation.

Learning by doing

While youth participation is our clear ambition, we recognise reaching a diverse group of young people requires time, persistence, and a creative approach, and not every attempt immediately resonates. For example, during our preparation, we shifted from inviting young people to come to us, to going to spaces where they naturally gather. These challenges are valuable lessons in an ongoing process, already strengthening our ability to engage young people effectively. Looking ahead, our programme will remain flexible, allowing young people to shape events and activities as their interests and needs evolve. In this way, our EYC candidacy is all about accelerating our learning to build participation structures for the future.

Types of programming

Before diving into the initiatives in our European Youth Capital programme, we introduce our three programme strands. The Curated Programme highlights the flagship initiatives built around our three core themes, produced either directly by LEYC2028 or **co-produced** with professional partners through formal agreements. The Open Programme is the core of our **youth-led vision**, where projects are initiated and owned by young people. The Partner Programme invites projects of **youth-focused organisations** committing to meaningful youth participation through Code Young receiving access to LEYC's communication channels, network, and visibility. These strands were co-created with three partners working closely with the municipality:

- **Tienskip**: a youth foundation bridging young people and democracy. Their involvement centres around the Youth Platform and Code Young which they have co-created.
- **Keunstwurk**: a grassroots arts & culture organisation led the development of the open programme, parts of the partner programme and bid development.
- **Arcadia**: the 2018 Capital of Culture legacy organisation focused on the Vitality and Sense of Belonging flagships and parts of the partner programme.

— Curated Programme —

Within our programme, 3 flagship initiatives will serve as the leading faces of our European Youth Capital year. Each project will embody the heart of one of our themes: Equity, Sense of Belonging, and Vitality. These flagship projects involve a select group of partners who receive partial funding to deliver high-impact initiatives. Young people have already provided input on how these flagships should take shape, and moving forward

they will join implementation teams and actively co-create the programmes. This ensures the flagships remain flexible in response to evolving youth perspectives.



Equity flagship - the Youth Platform

Empower voices from every terp

The Youth Platform is the flagship initiative of our Equity theme, putting into practice our commitment to ensure every young person in Leeuwarden has the chance to be seen, heard, valued, and to participate fully. It is a tool that structurally connects the diverse group of young people in Leeuwarden with municipal decision-making. The platform is led by three complementary organisations targeting youth, including Tienskip in a leading role. In addition, existing youth organisations play an important role in this platform by connecting their communities to the platform. Finally, several existing digital WhatsApp communities, such as LWD Next (born in the LEYC process), extend this reach further. This way, the youth platform connects the many ‘terpen’ of Leeuwarden into one strong landscape of youth participation.

In its core, the platform is a ‘two-way highway’ between young people and the municipality:

- The municipality can **gather youth perspectives** by testing policies or raising specific questions, by means of Code Young. The facilitators can design questionnaires or organise interactive sessions, selecting the methods most suitable for engaging their specific youth audience on a given topic.
- Young people and youth organisations can **place their own topics on the municipal agenda**. Facilitators can connect young people to the relevant municipal stakeholders or establish task forces on specific subjects important to or currently affecting young people, enabling them to submit formal advice to the municipality.

The Youth Platform transforms the current system by giving young people in Leeuwarden a **meaningful voice in policymaking** through a structural, low-threshold, two-way channel. Recognising young people are often busy, the platform prioritises flexible participation through existing organisations, online channels, and other creative methods, so involvement does not always require a large time commitment. By lowering barriers and building trust, the Youth Platform sparks cross-sector ideas (culture, sports, care, education) and makes youth involvement more efficient, inclusive, and sustainable. We also aim to organise a conference in 2028 where young people active in the platform’s task forces can exchange best practices with peers from other European cities, in line with the Dutch Youth Council’s (NJR) ambition to foster such exchanges.

Our promise to 2028 and beyond

From the launch of the youth platform onward, we will achieve an **annual growth of 30%** in the influence of young people on policy and its implementation, partially measured through Code Young. By 2026, we will connect at least **10 youth organisations** to the platform and, by 2027, establish a **representative and sustainable** Youth Platform that becomes a permanent part of the policy cycle.

Milestones on the road

- **Autumn 2025:** pilot launch of the Youth Platform. Start on the inventory of important themes.
- **Spring 2026:** joint long-term agenda developed with municipality and youth, linked to municipal elections.
- **End 2026:** first youth-initiated topics formally placed on the municipal agenda; expansion to at least 10 connected organisations.
- **2027:** the Youth Platform is representative and sustainable; annual evaluation of the long-term agenda.
- **2028:** at least 10 themes are placed on the municipal agenda through the platform, with at least 2 initiated directly by young people.
- **Beyond 2028:** legacy: structurally embedding the platform in the policy cycle.



Sense of Belonging flagship - The Spot(s)

Cozy spaces in between the terpen

The Spot(s) is the flagship initiative for our Sense of Belonging theme, welcoming **physical spaces** where young people can feel at home and connect, whatever terp they grew up on. Leeuwarden comprises 22 districts and 35 villages, each having young people eager for spaces where they belong. Through an open

call, a group of young people or youth organisations can apply for funding to develop their own Spot. These local 'Spots' can be formed into whatever young people want and need to create a place where they belong. This means one village can have a place heavily oriented around sports and another district one where young people choose to make it a hangout. **Young people are in charge**, while youth organisations and the LEYC work organisation offer support. In addition, young people and youth organisations will have the opportunity to take part in ERASMUS+ exchanges to learn from co-created youth spaces in other cities (such as Ghent, Lublin, and Cluj) and share the successes of The Spots.

Beyond creating safe spaces in the different districts and villages, one central 'The Spot' can be seen as the heart of our European Youth Capital year. As the LEYC headquarters for 2028, it will serve as the central location to receive information and host key programme elements. In more detail, it will host parts of the Skill Factory (explained later), acting as a learning hub and serve as neutral ground for discussions with policy makers and politicians, as facilitated by the Youth Platform. Moreover, this central Spot can be seen as a creative playground with spaces available for small events created by young people: from a club night with DJs to hobby clubs.

The Spot(s) is inclusive as it will welcome newcomers and international visitors in our headquarters as well as create safe spaces for young people from every background, whether it is youth from the LGBTIQ+ community or 'unseen youth'; all can express their needs and co-create spaces that reflect them. Moreover, it ensures that both urban and rural youth are actively involved, supporting the decentralisation of activities and strengthening of local communities (as in EU Youth Goal #6). This concept is also a response to the identified need for youth spaces, and was further worked out during our school tour where young people designed their ideal 'Chill spots'. They emphasised the importance of being involved in the design and programming, and expressed a wide range of preferences for the decoration of the space. It also aligns with the municipal policy goal to facilitate 'Broedplaatsen' (places to meet, work and create) through youth work embedded in districts and villages.

Our promise to 2028 and beyond

In 2028, The Spot(s) will provide **inclusive spaces** where young people can be themselves, meet peers, learn new skills and influence policy. Impact will be measured through participation and youth feedback. Beyond 2028, its successes will guide existing or future youth spaces in Leeuwarden or Europe. We aim for at least **15 Spots** to be created by young people or youth organisations.

Milestones on the road

- **2026:** formation of the LEYC work organisation and creation of a core group of young people who will co-design the headquarters.
- **End of 2027:** location will be ready and the building will be prepared. Both youth organisations as well as groups of young people can apply for funding to start their own 'Spot'.
- **2028:** the Spot becomes fully operational and linked to at least 10 other Spots in districts and villages.
- **Beyond 2028:** lessons and successes from the Spot will inform the creation or adaptation of permanent youth spaces in Leeuwarden, and serve as guidelines for other European cities.



Vitality flagship - Urban Games



Moving minds and bodies across the terpen

By turning the city into a giant living game board, the Urban Games encourage young people to descend their terp and sport and play, bringing our theme Vitality to life. During a series of weekends, streets across the city and villages will be temporarily closed off for traffic and turned into spaces for sports and offline gaming. Young people can participate in a large-scale tournament consisting of a great variety of sports and games: sports as football and 3x3 basketball celebrate the Netherlands' Olympic spirit, inspiring a new generation of athletes 100 years after the Olympic Games in Amsterdam, but also Frisian sports as 'fierljeppen' (traditional pole vaulting) and 'kaatsen' (Frisian handball). Moreover, timeless classics like Hide & Seek, Tag, and Capture the Flag, scavenger hunts inviting playful city exploration, oversized board games, and flashmob-style

activities transforming familiar streets into extraordinary spaces. They can choose to form a team with friends or mix it up and meet new people.

Through this wide range of sports and games, the Urban Games encourage all young people to connect through play. Via our European network, international guests are invited to explore Leeuwarden and join in the fun. Designed to be accessible and playful, the Urban Games promote social inclusion, while creating new sport opportunities, responding to the needs of Leeuwarden's youth. It also aligns perfectly with policy framework Sports & Movement 2025-2035, approved by the council in May 2025, which aims to enhance sporting opportunities in Leeuwarden and specifically highlights young people as a target group.

The exact fulfillment will be built in close cooperation with young people, local sports associations (around 250), student unions, gaming associations, and sport and gaming businesses over the next year. BV Sport, which manages the municipality's public sports facilities and neighbourhood sports programmes, plays a central role in making sports and games enjoyable and accessible to everyone.

Our promise to 2028 and beyond

By 2028, the Urban Games will have engaged **35% of young people** in Leeuwarden, in active, playful and social challenges. The event will not only **boost mental and physical vitality** but also spark teamwork and build **lasting communities**. Beyond 2028, the Urban Games will become a tradition, with the networks and communities formed during the events becoming a lasting part of Leeuwarden's active youth legacy.

Milestones on the road

- **2026:** young people work with partners to develop the concept and select sports and games.
- **Summer 2027:** pilot tournaments and games take place to test formats and gather feedback.
- **Spring & Summer 2028:** during LEYC2028, multiple weekends will see Leeuwarden transformed into a city-wide living sports and game board.
- **Beyond 2028:** the Urban Games will become an annual tradition, organised by local partners with municipal support, to ensure a lasting culture of physical activity and social connection.



Ik hoopje dat LEYC2028 doaren iepenje sil foar jonge minsken om te dwaan wat se wolle en te wêzen wa't se wêze wolle." - Esther

The quote is in Frisian as this is the native language of Esther. In English it translates to: "I hope LEYC2028 will open doors for young people to do what they want to do and to be who they want to be."

— Open Programme —

The open programme is made by and for young people and has closely followed Code Young in the development stage. Projects revolve around our themes Equity, Sense of Belonging and Vitality, but are not limited to a single theme. A project can connect to one, two or even all three themes, all focusing on letting participants Just. Be. Young.

Project500

Project500 is a low-barrier micro-funding initiative giving young people from Leeuwarden €500 to develop, test and scale their own ideas. With a straightforward application process and guidance from a predominantly youth-led commission, participants can submit either a ready-to-launch project or a concept in progress. Approved proposals receive €500 to bring their idea to life, along with visibility through social media and light-touch evaluation to track impact.

We started piloting Project500 in May 2025 and are already seeing what young people can achieve. Early projects include Summerplays, a mini-Olympics for youth who stayed home during the summer; artificial grass for a neighbourhood football field proposed by a 10-year-old; and a documentary where young people share their mental health stories to break the taboo. A first full review in December 2025 will assess impact and refine the model, aiming for structural funding in 2028 as part of the LEYC legacy.

Targets (2026–2028):

- 600 funded projects
- 3,700+ young people reached
- 330 social media features

For initiatives that grow beyond the €500 microbudget, Project500 includes two advanced tiers of support:

- **Mid projects:** for individuals or groups with solid plans and a legal entity. These projects receive coaching, budget support, and a tailored development path. *(Expected in 2028: 50 projects)*
- **Big projects:** for high-impact initiatives created in partnership with organisations. Evaluated by a committee (50% youth), these projects directly align with LEYC's core themes: Vitality, Sense of Belonging, and Equity. *(Expected in 2028: 10 projects)*

These tiers form a pipeline to the **Partner Programme**, connecting young creators to lasting opportunities, structural funding, and cross-sector partnerships. From the medium and big projects, we scout initiatives with strong international appeal or European links, and connect them to Erasmus+ funding through our partnership with the Dutch Erasmus+ Agency Youth, Sport & European Solidarity Corps. This helps young people and youth workers launch exchanges and international projects and allows us to showcase these initiatives across our European networks.

Skill Factory

The Skill Factory is a youth-designed learning hub equipping young people with essential life skills often missing from traditional education. By 2028, it will offer workshops tailored to young people's real interests and needs. Themes and learning methods for the workshops were selected based on a youth questionnaire and followed the hourglass method. Among young participants workshops on cooking and financial independence were most popular, and there were shared preferences for hands-on and active learning. The workshops aim to foster independence, personal development, and creativity, covering five core themes:

- **Cooking and Culture:** from beginner techniques and budget meals to exploring global cuisines and sustainable food choices, with shared meals to connect cultures and foster community.
- **Finances and Future:** workshops cover budgeting, taxes, and managing financial stress, alongside key life steps such as CV writing, job applications, and understanding insurance. Gamified challenges and real-life scenarios keep learning engaging.
- **Life skills and Sustainability:** independence skills with a sustainable mindset. Sessions include DIY home maintenance, and bicycle maintenance, as well as upcycling and zero-waste living.
- **Creativity and Technology:** workshops develop digital literacy and creative expression, including safe online engagement, storytelling, video editing, music production, and content creation.
- **Citizenship and Participation:** understanding local and European governance and learning how to take part in decision-making through youth councils, democratic processes, and programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Youth Parliament.

To give the workshops formal recognition, participating institutions will acknowledge the learning outcomes so young people can document them, similar to the Youthpass certificate of European youth programmes, adding clear value to CVs. This approach aligns with the European Skills Agenda and supports the Union of Skills initiative by promoting skills for life, work, and active citizenship in a future-oriented and inclusive manner.

Opening and Closing Festivals

We will kick off and round up our LEYC year with large festivals. This festival vibe reflects a clear wish expressed by young people and was already partially explored during our school tour, where they emphasised festivals should be low-cost or free for accessibility, and should feature a mix of big artists and local talent. These ideas will be further co-created with young people during the preparation phase.

— Partner programme —

The Partner programme contains submitted projects of youth-focused organisations. Central to this programme is a *community of practice* where all contributing partners meet with youth organisations and experts to share methods for youth involvement, co-ownership, and communication. Partners gain links to a European network and funding opportunities through cooperation with our partners the Dutch Erasmus+ Agency and EuropaPact Friesland (a regional non-profit European project advisor). This learning space builds capacity and fosters a collaborative culture, even for organisations new to youth participation.

Example projects:

Equity, Sense of Belonging & Vitality combined

Active Citizen Compass (Erasmus+): a self-assessment tool co-created in an Erasmus+ project with 6 European universities and 5 secondary schools helping young people and teachers strengthen active citizenship. Through dialogue, reflection, and joint projects, it fosters critical thinking, inclusion, and a strong Sense of Belonging, encouraging youth to become socially, mentally, and physically engaged change-makers in their communities. *Partners in Leeuwarden: Impulse Leeuwarden, OSG Piter Jelles. Focused on: rural and urban youth*

Fryslân Bloeit Young: empowers young people in Frisian villages and neighbourhoods to lead sustainable community projects, from biodiversity and health to local culture and energy. Active since 2023, the initiative will focus even more strongly from 2026–2028 on amplifying youth leadership and giving young voices real influence in shaping a sustainable future for their communities. *Partner: Netwerk Duurzame Gemeenschappen, many villages and their communities. Focused on: rural and urban youth*



Equity-focused

Futuremakers: Futuremakers is an annual career fair connecting (international) students aged 12-24 with bakery and confectionery companies for study, internship, or job opportunities. It brings together 25-30 companies, educational partners, and social organisations to showcase the industry's inclusive and healthy work culture. Organised by and for youth, it inspires young people to explore careers in the bakery and sweets sector. *Partners: Bakery Sweets Center. Focused on: rural and urban youth*

The Green Business Challenge: a series of 33 hackathons engaging 1,500 young people to develop strong Design Thinking skills and tackle real societal challenges—primarily focused on sustainability, but also addressing key social issues. *Partner: Brain Fuel. Focused on: all target groups*

Working Together – Speaking Together in Fryslân: young people with a migration background complete a 12–20 week language internship at regional companies, supported by a language and job coach. This helps them improve practical language and work skills while increasing their chances of employment and full participation in Frisian society. *Partners: Frisian municipalities and 100 regional employers from small and medium-sized businesses. Focused on: newcomers*

Equity & Sense of Belonging combined

Quiet Young: developing a youth-specific branch of the Quiet community, helping young people facing poverty access services, experiences, and community connections, for free. *Partner: Quiet Leeuwarden. Focused on: young people experiencing poverty*

Youth Take the Stage: a city-wide initiative to open up cultural institutions to the voices, ideas and leadership of a new generation. Anchored by theatre De Harmonie, the project invites young people to co-shape programming, strategy and public engagement across multiple cultural organisations in Leeuwarden, making space for youth-led innovation at the heart of the city's cultural life. *Partners: De Harmonie, local cultural organisations. Focused on: rural and urban youth, newcomers, and young people in vulnerable situations*

Sense of Belonging-focused

MOVE/SAVE: MOVE is an international youth exchange project connecting young people from Friesland with peers in rural regions of Serbia, Lithuania, and Croatia. Through cross-border encounters, MOVE explores themes of rural vitality, intercultural learning, and creative collaboration. Participants engage in immersive experiences fostering mutual understanding, personal growth, and a shared vision for vibrant rural futures. Funded by Creative Europe and Erasmus+, MOVE equips young people with tools to imagine and shape more inclusive and sustainable rural communities across Europe. *Partners: villages in Serbia, Lithuania, Croatia and Friesland. Focused on: rural and urban youth*



Sense of Belonging & Vitality combined

Atelier Sociaal Domein (Social Domain Lab): in this learning community, students work on solutions to address youth loneliness. Students from a variety of programmes (master's, higher professional, and vocational) are researching meaningful meeting spaces and support networks across Leeuwarden and Friesland. The research is driven by the voices and needs of young people themselves, focusing on what it takes for them to feel connected, valued, and included. Importantly, the young students conducting the research create peer-to-peer dialogue uncovering authentic insights and sparking ideas for real change. *Partner: NHL Stenden. Focused on: unseen youth (connected to flagship The Spot(s))*

Serious Game: The Serious Game on mental health is designed for students aged 16 to 22, focusing on secondary (vo) and vocational (mbo) education. The game connects with themes of Vitality and Sense of Belonging, creating a safe and engaging way to make mental health issues open to discussion. Players learn through gameplay, navigating choices and challenges reflecting real-life situations, often without even noticing they are learning. Each gaming session is followed by a guided conversation, turning in-game experiences into reflection, discussion, and awareness. *Partner: Firda. Focused on: all target groups*

Night Vision: Night Vision is a collaboration of many young artistic collectives offering cultural programmes at night. Together they advocate for more inclusive nightlife policies in Leeuwarden, improving attractiveness and youth participation. We will organise a public night meeting with the city council inviting them to start drafting a vision statement 'for the night' together. *Partners: Leeuwarden night collective, Leeuwarden city council. Focused on: young people in vulnerable situations*



Vitality-focused

Mind Power: mind power is an initiative aimed at improving mental health through sport. It was founded by Berber Swart, a 28 year old International Olympic Committee Young leader. Her approach is grounded in Olympic values and positive psychology. She is currently training youth workers and sports coaches to become Mind Power coaches, focusing on both sport and mental health within school settings. Her goal is to reach young people before they enter the youth care system, adopting a preventative approach. *Partners: BV Sport. Focused on: young people in vulnerable situations*

8. Management

The municipality's goal for LEYC2028 is to put young people at the forefront of leading their future. All young people connected to Leeuwarden are welcome to take part either through volunteering, partaking or working within the work organisation for LEYC. Professional partners are encouraged to develop their contributions to the LEYC programme with young people in the lead, following Code Young and supported by experienced organisations. LEYC is currently in contact with or reaching out to over 155 youth-focused organisations, cities and programmes of which 100 are official partner and have submitted a letter of support.

In the bidding process, the coordination team was the driving force behind all activities and consisted of 60% professionals under the age of 35.

Governing structure

At the heart of LEYC's governance is a youth-led working organisation, supported by partners and the municipality (which bears ultimate political and administrative responsibility).

Joint Decision Board

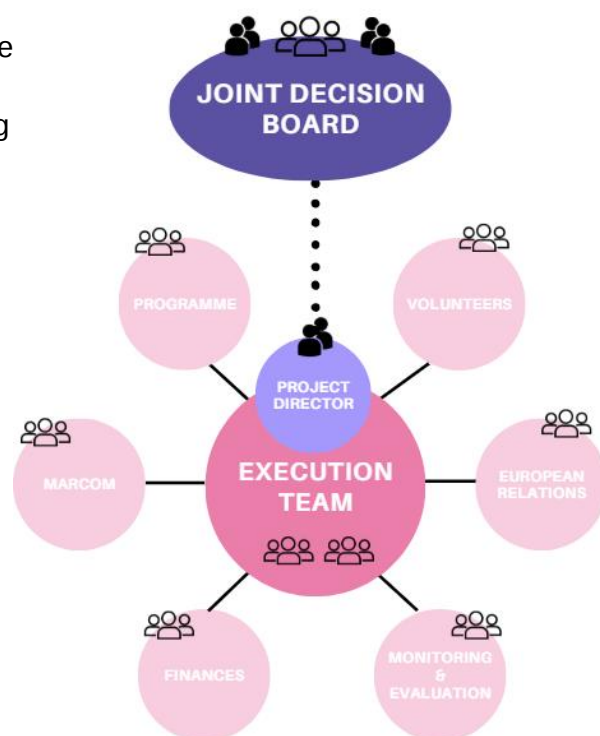
The Joint Decision Board is LEYC's strategic core with seven members: two municipal decision-makers and five young people coming from either our crucial collaborating partners or the youth sector within Leeuwarden. All members have equal voting power.

Responsibilities: strategic decision-making, setting direction, managing risks, and problem-solving.

Project Director

Appointed by the municipality, the Project Director ensures alignment with strategic goals. The Project Director works together with a young professional in a mentor-mentee construction.

Responsibilities: leadership, governance, and stakeholder management. Oversight of budget and resources, risk management, and monitoring programme performance in cooperation with the Execution Team. Acts as the central link between all partners and the European Youth Forum. Overall, maintaining coherence across the entire LEYC programme.



Execution team and subteams

Programme development, delivery, and legacy is organised into six teams with specific responsibilities, each composed of young professionals and coached via mentor-mentee pairs:

- **Volunteers:** coordinates local and international volunteers who partake in LEYC, international volunteers can also be part of this team. Main onboarding volunteer call takes place in mid-2027, for international volunteers via the European Solidarity Corps.
- **Programme:** oversees and/or manages all projects of the programme, this includes flagships, the youth sector network, and projects from the open programme.
- **Marketing & Communication (MarCom):** handles local and European outreach, communication and promotion. Within this team three young persons serve as reporters on the ground and act as the face of the MarCom team in social media output.
- **Finances:** oversees budgets and financial planning.
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** track KPI's, evaluate projects, and monitor Code Young implementation.
- **European relations:** strengthen European connections and renew the NEYC network (as explained later in this chapter).

From each subteam, one young employee represents their team in the Execution Team. The Execution Team, led by the Project Director and a mentee, serves as the central coordinating body, ensuring alignment, communication, and effective collaboration across all subteams.

Leadership by young people

To guarantee meaningful youth participation, we apply Code Young, which means every leadership role is either held by a young person, or organised as a mentor-mentee structure. In this tandem model, a young leader (the mentee) is guided by a skilled professional (the mentor), who transfers knowledge and responsibility. Following a clear path of shadowing, sharing responsibility, and eventually taking over responsibility, we make sure that a new generation of leaders is ready to shape our city.

A youth ecosystem

With LEYC we aim to create a youth ecosystem connecting youth platforms and organisations at the local, regional, national, and European levels. While cooperation with some local and regional initiatives already exists, our ambition is to strengthen these links and reduce the current fragmentation among youth structures. We are ‘connecting the terpen’ so to speak, as mentioned in our motivation.

- **Local:** linking local initiatives to each other to create a local youth ecosystem and connect this to European networks and initiatives.
- **Regional:** increasing partnerships with regional and national organisations such as the NJR (Dutch Youth Council). As an example, the NJR is looking to focus much more on rural and regional connections.
- **European:** strengthening collaboration with European Youth Forum Member Organisations, alumni of past European Youth Capitals, and international youth networks. For example, connections with cities like Ghent and Lublin have already been made and exchanges have taken place with young people traveling and learning. We want to further explore and develop this through reviving the alumni EYC network (**NEYC**). This network will also strengthen the European exchange between local youth councils, one of the goals of the NJR.

To make these connections visible and sustainable, we will develop a visual cooperation map of youth-focused organisations (by 2027), showing which partners are active, where, and how they collaborate. This map will be a living legacy tool (see Chapter 12), evolving alongside the growing ecosystem and turning short-term collaborations into long-term partnerships.

Inclusive participation

To ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised youth, LEYC collaborates with trusted partners who have an established track record of working with specific groups. Examples include *Buurtbazen* and *Neighbourhood Sport Coaches* who are embedded in local communities and have personal connections to disadvantaged youth. As demonstrated in the letters of support, LEYC is creating a broad and diverse network of organisations, each connected to their own communities. These range from youth and welfare organisations to educational institutions, as well as mental health and welfare partners. These partners are essential to reaching underrepresented groups and ensuring their presence in the programme and governance structures. We believe personal contact through a trusted organisation is key in reaching these marginalised groups. Projects engaging these communities will be given priority support.

Alongside this partner-based outreach, we also ensure direct, grassroots participation through *LWD Next*: an open community where every young person can engage with the European Youth Capital year. This diverse group of young people actively shapes the European Youth Capital programme by generating ideas, collaborating with partners, co-creating initiatives, offering advice on key issues, and voting on programme components. *LWD Next* functions as a real-time sounding board, with the WhatsApp group as a low-threshold access and a central legacy platform, guaranteeing all young people, not only those already connected through organisations, have a seat at the table.

Collaboration with former and upcoming EYC's

Now and in the future, Leeuwarden is committed to actively exchanging good practices with other European Youth Capital cities. The ambition is to collectively strengthen youth participation in local governance and urban development. This includes organising and hosting study visits (already underway) and engaging in European cooperation projects promoting mutual learning and long-term impact. Key examples:

- **Youth Exchange Visits:** in collaboration with former and upcoming European Youth Capitals such as Lublin (Poland), Ghent (Belgium) and Parma (Italy), international exchange visits have taken place between June and September 2025. On these trips, LEYC invited young people from Leeuwarden to explore youth engagement models in other European cities. These visits inspired local policy development and fostered networking between young people, municipal staff, and core team members. Our trip to

Parma has already sparked a new youth exchange: Bring Europe Home in spring 2026, which targets young people from candidate EYC's active in their local community.

- **CERV Child Programme: City Next – Up to You(th):** in partnership with the City of Ghent (Belgium), a proposal was submitted, focused on engaging 12 to 15 year olds in co-creating the “City of the Future.” Special attention was given to inclusive participation, particularly for young people from special education or newly arrived backgrounds.
- **URBACT Transfer Network:** Leeuwarden has applied to join a Transfer Network on participatory budgeting for youth, inspired by Cluj-Napoca's EYC2015 model, alongside the cities: Veszprém (Hungary), Bielsko-Biała (Poland), Valongo (Portugal), and Piacenza (Italy).
- **Restarting NEYC:** the European Youth Capital network will be renewed by LEYC with an event in 2028 so alumni cities can keep on growing and exchanging information and learn from each other.

Coordination with the European Youth Forum

In alignment with the conditions and expectations of the European Youth Forum, LEYC proposes holding joint planning workshops to co-develop goals, timelines, and mutual expectations. This early-stage collaboration will help establish a shared vision and clearly define roles and responsibilities. To ensure ongoing alignment, structured coordination meetings will be held: fortnightly during the preparation phase, monthly during implementation, and post-project for evaluation and reflection. The Project Director and the mentee are the primary point of contact with the European Youth Forum. This will guarantee consistent communication, timely updates, and alignment with shared objectives throughout all phases of the project.

9. Communication and outreach

Vision and core message

LEYC's communications strategy is rooted in a powerful belief: every young person deserves to **Just. Be. Young.**, free from pressure, judgment, or limitation. This is a call for space, self-expression, and trust. The public-facing call to action is: **Own Your Spot!**

Two-phase campaign: building and belonging

Phase 1: building the movement (2024–2027)

In this broad preparation phase, communication steadily grows in scale and reach. The whole phase focuses on co-creation, visibility, and momentum to cultivate a youth-led movement ahead of 2028. Youth are engaged through relationship-first outreach. This means they are engaged where they naturally gather (schools, youth centres, villages, sports, festivals) and online through WhatsApp communities, polls, and social media. We scale this engagement through multipliers such as schools (via citizenship education), youth workers, the NJR, village associations, local media, business partners, and the NEYC.. Each partner receives a light kit (ready-to-post assets + QR with unique tracking link) to measure impact. As 2028 approaches, we will steadily expand our communication efforts ensuring everyone across Leeuwarden, Fryslân, the Netherlands and Europe hears about our definitive programme, launched 100 days before 2028.

Key elements:

- Youth-created content (Instagram, TikTok, events)
- Regular in-person engagement, such as Project500
- Partner activations across schools, villages, and youth spaces
- Strategic storytelling positioning Leeuwarden as a symbol of possibility for smaller European cities
- Guest lessons at secondary and VET schools as part of citizenship education, a statutory duty in the Netherlands. This allows LEYC content to be directly integrated into the classroom, fostering active democratic citizenship
- A youth communications task force (promo team) of paid members helping to inform youth about Leeuwarden's journey towards the EYC title and offering opportunities to co-create the programme further
- Building a communication system with regional, national and international media partners

Phase 2: the EYC year (2028)

2028 is the culmination of all efforts: a year of experience, action, and international exchange.

Key elements:

- High-visibility campaigns showcasing what it means to *Just. Be. Young.* in Leeuwarden
- Cross-border storytelling: in partnership with EYC cities, European youth organisations, and mobility programmes (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, DiscoverEU), young participants share their exchange experiences through reels, blogs, and takeovers. This inspires peers and strengthens European connections
- Local campaigns around the three core themes, led by youth ambassadors
- The MarCom team comprising young reporters, communication professionals, international connectors, and media partners
- Building a communication system with regional, national and international media partners

Target groups and key messages

The core audience is young people aged 12–35 across Leeuwarden and the surrounding region. LEYC recognises the diversity within this group and tailors its messages accordingly:

- **12–15:** reached via schools, youth centres, and events. Focus: belonging and creativity. Tone: playful, visual, inspiring. Channels: TikTok, Instagram
- **16–21:** balancing school and part-time work. Focus: real-life action, freedom, visibility, and opportunity. Channels: TikTok, Instagram
- **22–35:** often studying, working, or starting families. Focus: leadership, co-ownership, and impact. Channels: LinkedIn, WhatsApp, direct project involvement.

Next to young people, professionals who work with youth, regional residents, and entrepreneurs are crucial for the success and legacy of LEYC2028.

Level	Target group	Key message
Local	Youth (12-35) from city and villages, professionals working with youth, and residents	“This is your city. Claim your space. Own your spot.”
Regional	Youth in Friesland, professionals working with youth, residents, and entrepreneurs	“Young voices shape Friesland — when we make space, we make it matter.”
National	Ministries, press, youth orgs	“Leeuwarden is a model for youth participation in regional Europe.”
European	Youth, EYC peers, jury, networks	“Just. Be. Young. A call for freedom, equity, and connection.”

Tools, inclusion, and language

Youth-led content is central to our strategy, produced by the promotion and editorial teams via:

- **Online:** Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp communities, reels, short-form video, digital storytelling, local influencers, and the LEYC website.
- **Offline:** Events, flyers, stickers, narrowcasting, schools, youth centres, and partner networks.

We prioritise inclusion by partnering with schools, social organisations, and trusted local initiatives focused on youth. The personal connections and established networks of these partners are crucial to reaching underrepresented youth, as they bring credibility and direct access to their own communities. Moreover, formats are low-threshold, multilingual (Dutch, Frisian, English), B1 level, and contain subtitles and alt text.

Organisation and sustainability

Coordination is led by the MarCom team comprising (young) communication professionals and interns (mentees). Measures to guarantee sustainability:

- Long-term integration of LEYC values into communication on policy and practice
- Reusable, recyclable materials and templates
- The use of online materials instead of print whenever possible
- Emphasis on public/shared transport in outreach efforts



Upon winning the title, the official EYC logo will be fully incorporated into our visual identity. The current youth co-designed brand is flexible and ready to integrate EYC branding across platforms and materials.

Monitoring & evaluation

Outreach and engagement are monitored via a dashboard combining UTM/QR data, social analytics, website sessions, event scans, inclusion, partner activation, and partner reports. KPIs are set for:

- Youth reach: ≥60% of Leeuwarden youth reached by 2027-28
- Engagement: ≥12% of reached youth actively interact (through a poll, DM, sign-up, event presence)

Momentum & legacy

LEYC is more than a one-year event; it is a platform to keep youth initiatives and voices visible long-term. Key LEYC channels (our social media, WhatsApp community and the LEYC website) will remain active to showcase youth projects, policies, and opportunities. As part of the legacy, the young reporters of our MarCom team will create a lookbook and movie, capturing the highlights of 2028. It will showcase projects, stories and experiences, serving as a lasting reference and inspiration for others.

10. Preparation for the LEYC year

Roadmap & key steps

Our preparation towards Leeuwarden European Youth Capital 2028 follows a clear four-phase roadmap.

1. **Exploration ground** (Q1 – Q3 2026): pilot projects and prototypes are co-created with young people to test approaches, learn what works, and encourage institutions to share decision-making power. Milestones include initial pilots and first feedback cycles.
2. **Activation & expansion** (Q4 2026 – Q1 2027): successful pilots are scaled to additional communities, youth engagement is broadened locally and internationally, and achievements are showcased to build momentum. Milestones include scaled initiatives and public visibility campaigns.
3. **Integration & sustainability** (Q2 – Q3 2027): youth participation becomes structurally embedded in governance frameworks, supported by new roles and accountability mechanisms. Guidelines, training modules, and policy recommendations are formalised. Milestones include formal embedding in policy and the launch of major preparatory events.
4. **Building expectations and last preparations** (Q4 2027): communication campaigns raise awareness across Leeuwarden, Fryslân, the Netherlands, and Europe. The programme is launched 100 days before the opening event, triggering an intensive communication campaign alongside the final logistical and operational preparations.

Milestones & deliverables

These different phases are underpinned by three parallel strands of development ensuring readiness in 2028:

- **Youth sector capacity building:** from early meetups to a strong, independent network after 2028.
- **Work organisation capacity building:** from a small core team to a full structure with embedded youth leadership.
- **Programme development:** from idea collection to a youth-led programme ready for launch.

The table on the next page brings these strands together and highlights concrete milestones and deliverables.

Timeline of milestones & deliverables

Year	Youth sector capacity building	Work organisation capacity building	Programme development
2024-2025	- Initial meetups with youth organisations and student groups: intro to LEYC, Code Young and EU funding	- A core team is formed with youth and experts from 4 partners.	- Idea collection from youth and partners. - Longlist programme ideas created.
2025	- Tienskip-led sessions with youth organisations. - Network building begins. - Visits to former EYC's lay the groundwork to restart the European Youth Capitals Alumni Network (NEYC).	- Youth hired in paid roles: promo team, editors, designer, project employee, school ambassador, Project500 pilot team (>50% youth).	- Youth-led decision-making. - Shortlist programme ideas formed. - Bid 3 submitted.
2026	- Continued meetups. - <i>From November</i> : focus on partnerships and project development.	- LEYC work organisation launched. - Youth leadership embedded through mentor-mentee constructs. - Project development and youth sector strengthening.	- Projects enter the development phase. - Plans programme finalised. - Community of Practice begins.
2027	- <i>May</i> : youth sector projects selected. - <i>October</i> : large network meeting with learning sessions. - Visual cooperation map created - Inviting NEYC members to restart the network.	- The team expands with project leads and volunteers. - Collaboration with schools. - International volunteer call. - Full activation of team and volunteers for LEYC year.	- Final selection and budgeting. - Production starts. - Youth-led monitoring.
2028	- <i>April</i> : Cross-city youth sector event. - Youth Agenda co-created with young people	- International event for NEYC.	- LEYC events launched. - Ongoing monitoring and Community of Practice.
2029	- Youth sector network operates independently. - <i>May</i> : municipality takes over facilitation. - NEYC is active.	- Organisation downsizes. - Legacy planning; remains active for at least 2 years to uphold systemic change giving time to embed within the municipality.	- Youth-led evaluation using structured methodology.

This phased and connected approach ensures the work organisation and the youth sector take meaningful roles in the LEYC year and create a lasting legacy at local, national and European levels.

11. Evaluation

Young people are at the heart of our evaluation process. The evaluation combines quantitative data and qualitative insights to capture both measurable outcomes and lived experiences. Storytelling is central to the evaluation, as testimonials, case studies, and youth-generated content will illustrate impact and enrich the narrative. The framework is guided using our main themes and follows a clear logic chain connecting our themes to KPIs and activities to impact and legacy.

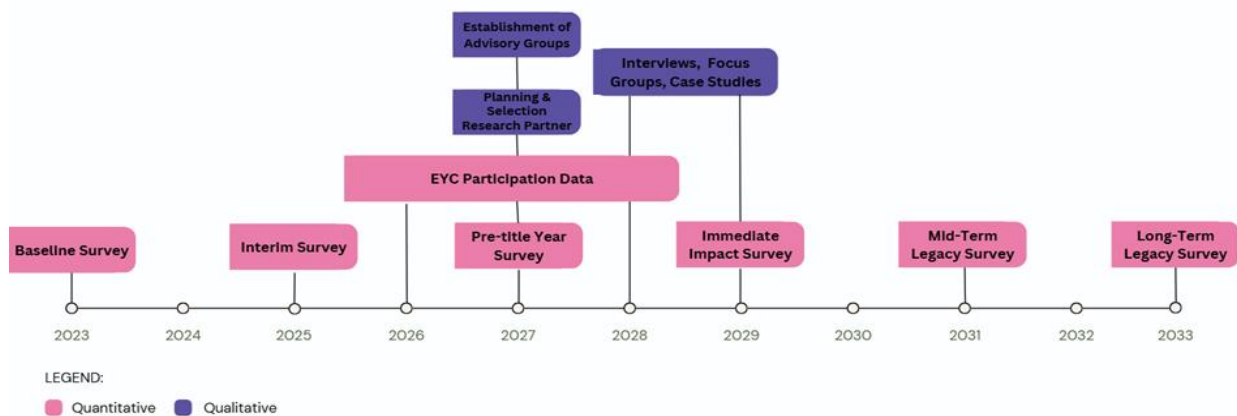
Methods and timing

A mixed-methods approach is carried out before, during, and after 2028, as displayed in the roadmap below:

- **Quantitative:** a large-scale, bi-annual youth survey explores key areas in young people's lives, including health, education, employment, social involvement, and opportunities to engage in decision-making topics. The municipality leads the survey, and promotes it widely, with specific outreach to young people with fewer opportunities. Additionally, data is captured on participants of LEYC activities in collaboration with

partners, and publicly available CBS (Statistics Netherlands) data is used to assess economic impact. All data is analysed by Team Monitoring & Evaluation, in collaboration with at least one independent regional data institute. Findings are shared via presentations, deep-dive sessions, and digital dashboards with youth, policymakers and European partners.

- Qualitative:** in-depth interviews, focus groups, and case studies capture personal experiences related to Vitality, Sense of Belonging, Equity and Youth Participation. Particular attention is given to vulnerable and hard-to-reach youth, organised in partnership with youth organisations (such as Amaryllis) and local youth workers. Both youth and professionals working with youth will be part of the storytelling. Research partners, preferably students at NHL Stenden and/or Campus Fryslân, will be selected to execute qualitative research.



Mixed-methods research roadmap

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To track progress and impact, we use a set of measurable and qualitative indicators directly linked to our main themes. These KPIs show how activities translate into concrete results and a lasting legacy. The indicators below form the core of our evaluation and are monitored from 2023 onward, if not stated differently.

Theme	Indicator	Method
Vitality	Self-reported physical and mental health	Quantitative
	Effectiveness of mental and physical health initiatives	Qualitative
Sense of Belonging	General happiness	Quantitative
	Intention to stay in one’s neighbourhood, village, or Leeuwarden	Quantitative
	The number of higher education students choosing Leeuwarden as their place to study	Quantitative
	The number of spaces available for youth in Leeuwarden	Quantitative
	Success of activities fostering a sense of community and identity	Qualitative
Equity	Trust of young people in their own future prospects (job, housing, life satisfaction)	Quantitative
	Impact of programmes offering equal opportunities, regardless of background	Qualitative
Youth Participation	Importance of involving youth in policy-making, seen through the eyes of young people	Quantitative
	Rating by young people of actual opportunities to engage in decision-making topics young people wish to influence (from 2025)	Quantitative
	Degree and quality of youth involvement in policy and programming	Qualitative
Economic	Number of visits to Leeuwarden	Quantitative

Reporting and dissemination

Interim reports follow each survey cycle by the LEYC2028 work organisation, with a comprehensive final report scheduled for May 2029. This final report will evaluate the overall impact of the LEYC year and provide recommendations for Leeuwarden's legacy and for future European Youth Capitals. All communication materials will be made available in Dutch, Frisian, and English, using youth-friendly language and design.

Dissemination strategy:

1. Initial presentation to young people and youth organisations to gather feedback and ensure relevance.
2. Subsequent sharing with policymakers, programme partners, and the wider public to inform policy and practice.
3. Dissemination will take place at local, regional (Friesland), national, and European levels to maximise reach and impact.

Key outputs will include:

- An online dashboard, available in Dutch and expanded into English from 2025 onwards
- Articles and reports co-created with young researchers
- Social media campaigns specifically tailored to young audiences
- Visual summaries to enhance accessibility and engagement
- Presentations to the European Youth Forum and other international partners

12. Impact and long-term legacy

This European Youth Capital 2028 bid provides a catalyst to embed meaningful youth participation, strengthen collaboration, and co-create lasting structures supporting Equity, Sense of Belonging, and Vitality. While the terpen in Leeuwarden's landscape once provided a safe ground, our LEYC year aims to bridge them to create inclusive platforms where young people can connect, be heard, and shape their future. Here we outline the expected immediate and long-term effects of this legacy, showing how our LEYC year will turn challenges into sustainable opportunities for young people.

Immediate effects

Leeuwarden will see tangible improvements in youth participation and empowerment already before and during the title year. By 2029, the aim is to improve young people's perception of their actual influence by 20% compared to the 2025 baseline. This goal is reached by systematically embedding youth input in decision-making processes, both in the municipality and across organisations working with young people. By 2028, 100% of municipal policy related to youth will be created using Code Young.

The activities in our programme will have immediate effects on young people's lives, strengthening their connection to the city, their confidence, and their well-being, while giving them an active role in developing each initiative. For young people with fewer opportunities, targeted outreach and support through initiatives like Project500 will increase access to activities, resources, and decision-making spaces, helping them develop skills, confidence, and networks. In addition to reaching young people within the municipality, we expect that the activities of the programme will lead to 300,000 extra visits to Leeuwarden in 2028.

Long-term legacy

During LEYC2028, a new Youth Agenda will be co-created by the municipality, partners and young people, treating the LEYC year as a living laboratory for youth participation. The most effective methods and initiatives will be carried forward, ensuring insights are directly translated into long-term policy: the Youth Agenda 2029–2033. We already expect that several initiatives will prove their value during the LEYC year and therefore become permanent features of the city, serving as visible legacies of the LEYC year:

- **The Youth Platform:** composed of youth organisations and the LWD Next community, the platform acts as a two-way highway between young people and the municipality from 2027.
Impact: a permanent and institutionalised channel ensuring low-barrier, structured dialogue between young people and policymakers.
- **Code Young:** a guideline ensuring genuine youth participation in policymaking is structurally embedded in the municipality. From 2028, 100% of youth-related policy is created using Code Young.
Impact: structural high-quality youth participation influencing subsidies and policy development.

- **Physical Youth Spaces:** the opportunity to co-create ‘the Spots’ will lead to the creation of new or improved physical youth spaces across the districts and villages of Leeuwarden.
Impact: increased access to places that feel like home for young people.
- **Skill Factory:** integrated into existing youth workspaces, offering workshops regularly and providing a formal recognition of learning outcomes.
Impact: broader and better skills for young people entering the labour market and adult life.
- **Project500 (micro-budgeting):** secured municipal funding will sustain Project500 incentivizing youth to organise initiatives responding to community needs.
Impact: continuous youth-led community initiatives, increasing civic engagement and ownership.
- **LWD Next:** continuing as a dynamic and evolving community for and by young people advising the municipality and other institutions. It serves as an example of the type of communities we hope continue to emerge from our programme elements, such as the Urban Games.
Impact: sustained participation and sense of belonging, also for those who lack a local network.
- **Youth Ecosystem (and a Visual Cooperation map):** (new) lasting collaboration between local, regional and European organisations due to the youth sector network and community of practice.
Impact: stronger infrastructure, reduced fragmentation and smarter use of resources.

Shared learning

Through European partnerships (with youth organisations, and via the NEYC network and RUN-EU network of universities) as well as European programmes (such as URBACT Transfer and Interreg Europe), the Youth Agenda 2029-2033 and initiatives like Code Young and Project500 will be shared as open-source best practices. Exchange visits, peer-learning sessions, and joint projects will lead to continuous knowledge transfer. The legacy will be monitored via the existing bi-annual survey and evaluated in future Youth Agendas, with all initiatives committed to low-carbon operations so environmental sustainability is embedded in the city’s long-term youth policy. In this way, our legacy becomes a strong and sustainable model, extending from our Frisian ‘terpen’ to youth landscapes across Europe.

13. Budget indications

The estimated project costs for LEYC2028 amount to €7 million. It is expected the municipality of Leeuwarden will contribute €4.9 million of which €2.5 million already has been committed to. This contribution is intended specifically for LEYC and does not include regular (recurring) budgets. The overview below shows the distribution of the budget over the coming years and the amount of secured budget so far.

Estimated costs and funding for EYC2028 by the municipality of Leeuwarden			Secured
Phase 1 and 2 – 2024 and 2025	Preparing the bid book Selection and assessment June 2024 – November 2025	€ 710,000	100%
Phase 3 – 2026 and 2027:	Preparation for the run-up and starting-up the LEYC programme December 2025 – December 2027:	€ 1,790,000	100%
Phase 4 – 2028:	Implementation year 2028	€ 4,000,000	30%
Phase 5 – 2029:	Legacy 2029	€ 500,000	
Estimated costs implementation:		€ 6,290,000	
Total expected costs:		€ 7,000,000	
<i>Contributions from funds, subsidies, sponsoring and programme-partners</i>		€ 2,100,000	57%
<i>Municipality's contribution (in total – phase 1 – 5):</i>		€ 4,900,000	51%
Total budget:		€ 7,000,000	53%

A total budget of €7 million, of which €4.9 million comes from municipal resources, will be allocated to the European Youth Capital programme for the years 2024 through 2029. 710,000 euros were secured for phase 1 and 2 and have been partially invested into a pilot for Project500 (as mentioned in Chapter 7). The council has also formally approved 1.79 million for phase 3 (preparation) on 17 September 2025. This budget will support the necessary organisation as well as the plans of young people regardless of whether Leeuwarden wins the title. In addition, 1.2 million has already been secured through our partner programme; we expect another 350,000 euros through sponsorships and 550,000 euros of additional cofinancing. This totals to the 2.1 million as mentioned in the table as *contributions from funds, sponsoring and programme-partners*.

In November 2026 the council will decide on the remaining (2.4 million) municipal budget for LEYC. The allocation dedicated to legacy may seem low compared to the overall budget. The main reason is that the legacy of LEYC (e.g. Code Young, the youth platform) is seen as the new standard of policy making based on youth participation. Post-2028, the outcomes of LEYC, including its methodologies, working approaches, and lessons learned, will be integrated into regular policy and financial planning.

Investing in youth

The municipality provides various types of funding to support young people across different areas of their lives. This ranges from providing financial assistance enabling young people from low-income families to join sports clubs or take cultural lessons to develop their talents to subsidising youth workers. Annually, the municipality invests between €70 million and €90 million in youth care, youth work, youth healthcare, life coaching, and support for school dropouts, among others. For LEYC we want to reinforce ownership and visibility of youth priorities across the entire framework.

The Open Programme for LEYC is fully designed for and by young people. 40% of the total programme budget is allocated to the Open Programme. This concerns the entire micro-budgeting range through growing to (ultimately) a large/larger programme component. In addition, 15% of the staff costs are allocated for the mentor-mentee construct to ensure young people in the working organisation are fully supported by skilled professionals to take ownership and contribute to youth priorities. We have not distinguished between capital and operating costs, because we intend to utilise as many existing facilities and buildings as possible for use by young people. Therefore, we do not foresee substantial capital costs.

Institutions coming together

LEYC2028 so far has been established in partnership with three collaboration partners. During the preparation phase, these partners contribute by providing personnel and facilities while charging only a small proportion of associated hours and costs. This combined with the projected sponsorships and investments from partners strengthens our financial position. However, in order to demonstrate resilience and ensure continuity of commitment, we phase the activities of the title year according to priorities. Activities focussing on ownership and youth participation are given priority. In financial planning, this means that the primary focus is on the Open Programme and the Democratic Programme (Code Young, Youth Platform etc.).

The Partner Programme is financially independent, since this is funded by our partners, and can operate on its own. The Curated Programme can be scaled down in size if the financial situation requires this. Municipal colleagues from the Department of Economic Affairs have built strong relationships with committed private companies in Leeuwarden and are actively approaching warm leads for sponsorship opportunities – including big international organisations such as Achmea and Rabobank who have given their support. This approach has already led to active engagement as our support letters show, and we will continue to build on this in the coming years by connecting prospective partners to the programme's content, with a particular focus on the key themes and the Code Young initiative.

From the public sector	EUR	% of the total EYC budget
EU	450,000	6,5%
National and regional government	500,000	7%
Other public	800,000	11,5%
Municipality	4,900,000	70%
From the private sector	EUR	% of the total EYC budget
Sponsorships	350,000	5%

By *other public* we refer to contributions to the partner programme by our non-profit partners, who use a mix of national and regional funds for this purpose.

Regarding EU funding, we are currently working on several ESF grant applications connected to parts of the LEYC programme. One of these applications focuses on youth participation and covers a three-year period from the end of 2025 through 2028. Another application, under the 'ESF Social Inclusion' program, is aimed at activities to break and prevent social isolation. This funding is intended for the Youth Perspective Fund, which addresses youth debt issues. Participation in this programme requires young people to engage in activation and participation trajectories. It is expected that the funding will amount to several hundred thousand euros. The municipality of Leeuwarden has submitted a grant application for Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values-programme (CERV). Also, a grant application has been approved for the European Migration and Security Funds (EMVF), which consists of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF grant).

A breakdown of the LEYC budget can be found in the table below:

Programme	MarCom	Organisation	Total
Open: 40%	Marketing	Staffing	
Curated: 10%	Communication	Meetings and gatherings	
Partner: 10%	Outreach	European meetings and exchanges	
Democratic: 10%	Communication materials	Research, evaluation & monitoring	
		Facilities and logistics	
		Unforeseen	
70%	15%	15%	100%

14. European Youth Forum Events

Leeuwarden, a city with a rich history of hosting large-scale events, is the perfect venue for the Statutory Meeting and the European Youth Capital Award Ceremony. With extensive experience managing international gatherings, well-equipped facilities, and a strong commitment to supporting youth initiatives, Leeuwarden is fully prepared to make these events a resounding success.

Expertise in event organisation

Leeuwarden has demonstrated its capability to host significant cultural, political, and community-driven events. From large-scale festivals to high-profile scientific conferences, the city excels in creating an engaging and welcoming atmosphere. Its event management teams are seasoned in coordinating multi-day programmes, ensuring smooth logistics, robust security, and an inspiring environment for delegates and guests alike. Having served as a European Capital of Culture, Leeuwarden's reputation as a hub for dialogue, creativity, and youth engagement is well established. As mentioned in chapter 4, Leeuwarden has excellent accommodation and transport infrastructure to facilitate accessibility.

Commitment to financial & logistical support

Leeuwarden adopts a proactive stance in securing financial resources to support major events, ensuring the Statutory Meeting and European Youth Capital Award Ceremony proceed without constraints. Local authorities, cultural and educational institutions, and business partners are prepared to contribute through funding, sponsorship, and in-kind support. Students from NHL University and Firda will play a leading role in organising these events. With the help of our EU Office in Brussels, Leeuwarden collaborates closely with

Friesland Convention Partners to attract and manage both local and European events, with a vital role envisaged for them in the European Youth Capital preparations.

Leeuwarden embodies the spirit of youth empowerment, sustainability, and international cooperation. With outstanding venues, proven expertise, solid financial backing, and excellent accessibility, Leeuwarden stands ready to deliver an inspiring and seamlessly organised Statutory Meeting and European Youth Capital Award Ceremony that will leave a lasting impact.



I hope LEYC2028 will become the heartbeat of a generation, where voices once faint now echo with purpose, where dreams of the young are not just heard, but built, brick by brick, into the foundations of a brighter tomorrow. – Rico, a 22 year old student and writer of the first bid.

15. Contingency planning

Here we outline how we will safeguard the European Youth Capital project against political, operational, engagement or financial uncertainties. The SWOT table summarises all factors that shape the feasibility.

SWOT-analysis

Strengths (<i>internal, positive</i>)	Weaknesses (<i>internal, negative</i>)
Youth-led approach with five young members on the seven-member Joint Decision Board, 50% youth staffing and structured youth participation (Code Young)	Youth participation not yet fully embedded in municipal processes
Over 50% of the total budget is secured and there is co-financing experience from previous major events	Dependency on the new city council (in office: 2026) for the remaining €2.4M
Commitment to sustainability (climate, circular economy)	Youth challenges: mental health, poverty, job opportunities, housing, etc.
Strong infrastructure and accessibility of the city (also by bike and foot)	Demographic pressure due to an aging population: more 65+, less 35-
Inclusive and multilingual environment	
Proven event hosting experience (e.g. LF2018)	
Clear, aligned youth policy (2024–2028)	
Grassroots ownership of project ideas	
Opportunities (<i>external, positive</i>)	Threats
LEYC as catalyst for long-term change	Political shifts (national elections in October 2025 and local elections in March 2026)
Long-term legacy: Code Young, Youth Platform, Skill Factory, etc.	Youth engagement may decline when involved young people grow older or leave for study/work
Strong thematic focus: Equity, Belonging, Vitality	Declining trust throughout society in government institutions
Leverage EU connections and funding (e.g. Erasmus+)	Operational failure (coordination, logistics, delivery)
Strengthening European identity	Economic downturn/inflation affecting costs and support
€2.1M external funding targeted	Partial co-funding gap (€900,000 still needed)
DIY mentality of local community in villages and neighbourhoods	Leeuwarden is perceived as less attractive by young people than it was five years ago
Many action-driven self-organising young people	
Extensive network of professional partners (regional/EU)	

Risks and mitigation

Building on the SWOT, the following risk assessment matrix details the principal risks and our mitigation strategy to ensure the success of Leeuwarden's European Youth Capital year.

Risk assessment matrix

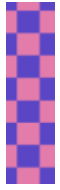
I = Impact - Effect on project success: H = High / M= Medium / L = Low

L = Likelihood - Probability of occurrence: H = High / M = Medium / L = Low

Risk	I	L	Mitigation & contingency measures	Budget allocation
1. Delay or refusal of budget approval due to political change (new city council in '26)	H	M	- Maintain ongoing engagement with political and community stakeholders. - Secure formal commitment of the council in November 2026. The budget for preparation is secured already by the current council. - Prepare flexible programme scaling if funding is reduced. - Align LEYC activities with council priorities. - Strengthen regional and national partnerships to ensure continuity if local backing wanes. - Execute a focused communication strategy to keep LEYC visible during political transitions.	- Reserve fund for potential shortfalls. - Secure €2.4M in November 2026.
2. Shortfall in external funding	H	M	- Diversify funding sources. - Link fundraising to specific events. - Use new and upcoming programme-activities and events to attract new sponsors and partners.	- Dedicated fundraising budget - Reserve for co-financing gaps
3. Decline in youth engagement	M	M	- Pilot youth initiatives (Project500). - Use digital platforms (LWD Next). - Institutionalise Code Young framework. - Use young reporters and the warm networks of partners within the youth community.	- Funds for youth programmes & capacity building.
4. Delays in urban transformation projects	M	L	- Strong project oversight. - Alternative venues and plans. - Proactive communication with stakeholders.	- Contingency budget for delays. - Operational flexibility funds.
5. Operational failure (logistics, coordination)	H	L	- Employ experienced event management. - Clear roles & communication. - Risk monitoring and contingency planning.	- Budget for expert management and emergency response.
6. Economic downturn / inflation	M	M	- Monitor economic trends. - Prioritise essential expenditure. - Diversify funding sources.	- Inflation reserve. - Flexible financial management.
7. Geopolitical instability or terrorist threat	H	L	- Monitor geopolitical developments via government advisories (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs / EU sources). - Include flexible clauses in partnership agreements (force majeure, postponement options). - Develop hybrid alternatives for planned activities. - Establish an emergency response plan in case of rapid escalation.	Contingency reserve (10% of organisational budget) to cover cancellations, rerouting, or switching to online formats.

The contingency planning in this bid actively empowers youth structures, by embedding mechanisms that ensure young people co-govern and co-create solutions even when unforeseen risks arise. The EYC title is

collectively owned, by the municipality, by a network of partners and, most importantly, the young people of Leeuwarden and its surrounding villages. This shared ownership forms the solid foundation for a resilient and impactful LEYC year. Together, these measures ensure that Leeuwarden is ready to deliver a European Youth Capital year where every young person can thrive across our 'terpen' landscape and Just. Be. Young.



Closing thoughts from one of the editors:

Now that this bid process is over, my job ends too. But don't worry—you'll be hearing from me again soon. From me, and from the tens of thousands of empowered young people in Leeuwarden. We have a voice, and now more than ever, we are encouraged to use it. So we will!

- *Mihai Cășălean, 20 years old, international student at NHL Stenden University in Leeuwarden*

