

Renewal of Library Covenant 2024-2027

Covenant containing agreements on the contribution of library services in the Netherlands
to societal challenges



Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en
Wetenschap

KB } nationale
bibliotheek

ip^o Interprovinciaal Overleg
van, voor en door provincies

spn 
Samenwerkende
POI's Nederland



vob  Vereniging Openbare
Bibliotheken

The State of the Netherlands, the Interprovincial Consultation, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the National Library of the Netherlands, Stichting Samenwerkende POIs Nederland, and the Association of Public Libraries conclude a covenant, in which they are represented by:

1. the State of the Netherlands, represented for this purpose by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Eppo Bruins, hereinafter referred to as 'the Minister',
2. the Interprovincial Consultation, with its seat in The Hague, represented for this purpose by Sjaak Simonse, hereinafter referred to as 'IPO',
3. the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, with its registered office in The Hague, represented for this purpose by Nathalie Kramers, hereinafter referred to as 'VNG'.

Collectively referred to as: 'the government parties'

And,

4. the National Library of the Netherlands, with its registered office in The Hague, represented for this purpose by Wilma van Wezenbeek, hereinafter referred to as 'KB',
5. Foundation Cooperating Provincial Service Organizations ("Stichting Samenwerkende POIs Nederland"), with its registered office in Hoofddorp, represented for this purpose by Annelies Bakelaar, hereinafter referred to as 'SPN',
6. the Association of Public Libraries, with its registered office in Utrecht, represented for this purpose by Klaas Gravesteijn, hereinafter referred to as 'VOB',

collectively or individually referred to as: 'the library parties'

All signatories are referred to collectively in this covenant as: 'parties'.

Introduction

This covenant sets out the principles and the manner in which the parties wish to interact with each other. The parties cooperate with each other on the basis of mutual trust, understanding and transparency.

The covenant contains the overarching ambitions of the above parties as well as goals and tasks they will work towards in the coming years. A number of concrete actions for each task have also been formulated for one or more of the parties. The actions described in this covenant are not exhaustive. The library parties will provide further elaboration of the covenant agreements in the network agenda. The government parties will be involved in the creation of the network agenda.

The government parties (municipality, province and state) bear collective responsibility for the system of public libraries in the Netherlands, with the Minister of Education, Culture and Science bearing overall system responsibility. The role of the government parties in this covenant is to promote a good link between policy and practice, with information arising from the collaboration between the library parties being actively incorporated into policy-making. The government parties are committed to making the agreements between the parties sustainable in policy terms and anchored in policy plans.

The role of the library parties in this covenant is to contribute to the realization of the challenges in library practice, in which they have the freedom to come to their own interpretation how to realise the agreements. They also actively communicate with the government parties on developments and needs from the field.

1. General principles

- a. The parties work together in a task-oriented manner across the network.
- b. The covenant regulates which tasks the parties will take up together, with different roles for the government parties and the library parties appropriate to their (statutory) task.
- c. The agreements in this covenant are in line with the Public Library Facilities System Act (Wsob). The public values in Section 4 of the Wsob form the starting principle: '*A public library has a public role with regard to the general public, based on the values of objectivity, reliability, accessibility, diversity and authenticity.*'¹ The parties are aware that the Wsob will be amended during the term of this covenant, from which point the amended Wsob will be the starting principle.
- d. The covenant is in line with social challenges that the government and other public organisations are working on. By working on the social challenges, the parties give substance to the sustainable development goals around literacy, lifelong learning and fighting inequality.¹ The parties take into account recent reports explicitly articulating the challenges.²
- e. This covenant assumes a best-efforts obligation for all parties to achieve the stated goals. The agreements in this covenant are not enforceable.
- f. No new financial obligations arise from this covenant for the parties involved and no financial resources are made available with this covenant.

The parties agree as follows:

2. Goals and scope

By entering into this covenant, the parties aim to enhance the ability of libraries to make a positive contribution to current social challenges. Libraries want to remain significant for residents. To this end, they now focus on three major social challenges: promoting a literate society, promoting participation in (information) society and promoting lifelong development.

The parties realise that the social challenges will not be solved within the term of the covenant. By concluding the covenant, the parties want to continue to make positive joint contributions to **these** social challenges. To concretise the ambitions set out in this covenant, the parties will ensure that agreements are included in the network agenda to be published to ensure that parties move from ambition to realisation.

This covenant concerns public library in the Netherlands and covers both the physical and digital services of library facilities.

¹ See: <https://www.sdqederland.nl/>.

² Rli, ROB & RVS (2023). *Every region counts; Netherlands Institute for Social Research (2023). Contemporary inequality. Education Inspectorate (2023). The State of Education 2023. Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2022). Work Agenda Value-Driven Digitisation.*

3. Focus on three current social challenges

Challenge 1: Literate society - Promoting literacy and enjoyment of reading

The parties believe it is important that the library is an essential partner in encouraging reading from earliest childhood. Libraries do this by virtue of the general statutory library tasks, but also through special programmes such as the Library at School (dBos) and BookStart. This will focus on the continuous reading plan in which the family approach plays an important role.

Among others, the following actions will be carried out within this challenge:

- The parties explore ways in which every child can automatically become a member of the library to promote equality of opportunity.
- The library parties intensify their close cooperation with schools and aim for the eventual full coverage in offerings from the libraries of the Library at School (dBos) for primary and secondary schools. At the national level, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science investigates whether the cooperation between libraries and schools on promoting reading can be improved and made more sustainable within both the library and education systems, collaborating with the other government parties and using existing research.
- The library parties expand the support for youth programs and enrichment offerings for youth in every library.

Challenge 2: Participation in (information) society - Digital inclusion, democracy and citizenship

The parties consider it important for everyone to be able to participate in (information) society. Society is becoming increasingly complex. Libraries make knowledge and information available and play a stimulating role in unlocking, sharing and activating information. They contribute to strengthening democracy and citizenship. Libraries offer help to people with questions about digital information. This enables people with little or no digital skills to continue to participate. In addition, libraries are committed to increasing self-reliance. This starts with basic skills such as being able to read, write and digital proficiency. Digital citizenship also means enabling people to move actively, skilfully and resiliently in online society. Libraries are also committed to supporting education in digital literacy.

The following actions, among others, will be taken up within this challenge:

- The parties stress the importance of digital inclusion of citizens. The library parties contribute to this by giving Digital Government Information Points (IDOs) a permanent place in the library and its **services**. The ambition is to increase the reach of IDOs and broaden the assignment. The VNG supports municipalities in fulfilling their governing role with regard to IDOs. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is in close contact with the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, which is responsible for financing the IDOs to align the design of IDOs with library practice.
- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is exploring the possibility of further developing cooperation between libraries and schools on digital literacy.
- The parties will build and continue the role of libraries in strengthening democracy and digital citizenship.

Challenge 3: Lifelong development - skills and continued employability

Libraries provide a public, neutral and accessible (learning, meeting and development) place for everyone. The parties consider it important for everyone to be able to continue to participate, learn and gain new insights in a manner and at a pace of their own choosing. It concerns non-formal and informal learning, meeting and accessing arts and culture. It is also about acquiring basic skills (such

as reading, arithmetic, digital skills) and developing skills that contribute to continued employability. The parties share a desire to increase the reach of library services among residents of the Netherlands.

Efforts to address this challenge include the following actions:

- The parties will explore how to increase the reach and use of libraries, for example by expanding free membership for the local library in municipalities.
- The parties share the ambition to strengthen the quality of language centres and ensure continuity. Based on the recommendations from research³ on Language Centres and insights from certification, the library parties are making efforts to undergo a quality transformation with language centres in libraries. The quality transformation is also about **improving the reaching among** the NT1 target group **better**.⁴
- In the coming period, the parties will explore which activities are appropriate for the role of the library as a place for lifelong development. Part of this involves collaborative programming with the community.
- The library parties are working to build a collection and programming around educational content and information resources (physical and digital), which is made easily accessible to people who want to learn and their tutors.

4. **Basic guarantee**

To be able to contribute to the three current social tasks mentioned above, it is important for the library to be a robust organisation. This can be done by focusing on a number of preconditions.

To achieve these preconditions, the following actions, among others, will be taken up:

- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is working on the new **Wsob** which stipulates that every municipality must have at least one fully-fledged library branch. The parties are working together to realise this.
- The library parties emphasise the importance of investing in training and developing library **staff and volunteers**. In any case, that means developing industry training.
- Mandatory **certification** of libraries and Provincial Support Institutions (POIs) remains an important tool for maintaining the high quality of services and programmes.
- Library parties provide **monitoring** of library services and programmes. The KB is fleshing this out in coordination with the library network. Measuring impact and tracking library funding are key components of this.
- The library parties are strengthening cooperation in **ICT**, for example by realising a basic library system and focusing on information security and privacy. They do so using a coordinated infrastructure.

5. **Duration, review and dissolution**

- a. The agreements in this covenant apply from 30 September 2024 to 30 September 2027. This covenant thereby follows the 'Library Covenant 2020-2023', whose duration has been extended by one year (i.e. until 30 September 2024).
- b. The parties will bring this covenant to the attention of their stakeholders or members and promote their active cooperation to achieve its objectives.

³ Brandenburg Opinion (2022). *A varied and diverse landscape: (Digital) Language Centres in the Netherlands. Inventory of support needs of Language Centres.*

⁴ NT1 is Dutch as a first language. These are adults whose mother tongue is Dutch.

- c. Representatives of the parties will meet at least once a year at **the** administrative level to discuss the progress of the covenant's implementation and to go through actions at the initiative of the minister.
- d. The parties will evaluate the cooperation halfway through the term of this covenant in a joint meeting. The review will at least include gaining insight into the status of the covenant's objectives. For the sake of the desired transparency, all parties will then provide (numerical) insight around monitoring and certification of quality. The parties will then agree on further monitoring of the covenant. A report will be drawn up of the meeting and will include the arrangements for further monitoring.
- e. If the evaluation shows that a majority of all parties believe that this covenant is not having the desired effects, the parties will discuss it with one another to find a solution.
- f. If one of the parties does not comply with the agreements in this covenant, the parties will discuss it with one another to reach a solution.

Final provisions

7. Amendments

- a. Any party may submit a written request to other parties for the covenant to be amended. The amendment requires the written consent of all parties.
- b. The parties will enter into consultations within six weeks of a party giving written notice to the other parties of its desire to do so.
- c. Amendments or additions to this covenant must be agreed in writing between the parties and recorded and signed by duly authorised persons.

8. Publication

- a. The text of this covenant will be published in the Government Gazette within one month of its signing.
- b. The text of the covenant is also published on the websites of the KB, IPO, VNG, VOB and SPN.

Thus agreed on the last of the dates stated below and signed in six copies:

The Hague, 10 October 2024

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The Minister

Eppo Bruins

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IPO

Sjaak Simonse

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VNG

Nathalie Kramers

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KB

Wilma van Wezenbeek

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SPN

Annelies Bakelaar

.....

VOB

Klaas Gravesteijn