Playbook

How to Establish Community-Wide Residency Program

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Mindset
Designing a format that is radically open and locally rooted—one that can adapt to different sizes, seasons, and cities.

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Colophon

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Learnings from a Prototype

This playbook draws from the experiences of conceptualising, organising and hosting Malmö Residency 2025 – a city-wide residency in which the business community of Malmö invited eight persons from around the world to spend a spring month in Sweden's third-biggest city.

We set out to prototype a new kind of residency in Malmö. One that wasn't bound to a gallery, studio, or office. One that moved across the city like a current—collecting moments, connections, and contradictions as it went. A city-wide residency.

The intention was simple, though not altogether modest: to bring together thoughtful people from elsewhere, pair them with hosts rooted in the local ecosystem, and create the conditions for something to unfold between them. Not a project. Not a product. A presence and a perspective.

Unlike many programs that drop experts into communities with expectations of solving something, this residency is about integration—not extraction. Residents are encouraged to embed, listen, connect, explore. Their presence isn't framed as intervention—it's framed as exchange. In return, cities open themselves up. Not just physically, but emotionally. They stretch.

It wasn't always clear what the outcomes would be, and that was part of the point. By opening a space without demanding closure, we hoped to let a different kind of imagination take root—one that was slower, more relational, more emergent. Serendipitous.

Malmö Residency 2025 was funded by Tillväxtverket (The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth) and the City of Malmö. It was a collaboration between 70+ companies in Malmö, the City of Malmö, the Swedish Institute and Media Evolution.

Community-Wide and Open-Ended

Somewhere between a short visit and a full relocation lies a powerful in-between: time spent **embedded** in a new place—long enough to belong, short enough to stay curious.

Malmö's City-Wide Residency was born out of a simple question: **What if people could stay just a little longer?** For years, organisations welcomed international guests to Malmö for conferences and events. Again and again, we'd hear: "We just started falling for this place—and now we have to leave." So we decided to do something about it.

A city-wide residency creates space for deeper exchange—not as tourists, not as permanent residents, but as temporary neighbors. It allows people to step outside their usual rhythms and be immersed in a new city; professionally, culturally, socially, and emotionally.

The playbook you're reading is for any place curious about inviting others in. It's about designing a format that is radically open and locally rooted—one that can adapt to different sizes, seasons, and cities.

A Residency That's Personal

Behind every residency is a personal longing—for perspective, for exchange, for pause. As one of our organisers put it, "every time I spend time outside my own city, I'm reminded of how much it opens me up. There's so much learning in being surrounded by people who don't share your context."

At its core, our residency is also something we'd like to be part of ourselves. A global network of open, embedded residencies would benefit everyone—including us. This is our way of contributing to that future.

A Residency That's Civic

The residency also addresses real civic and economic needs. Malmö, for instance, has both high unemployment and a shortage of specific senior competencies. The residency becomes a response—not by

filling vacancies directly, but by showing that even a relatively small and peripheral city can offer a meaningful professional and personal experience.

It becomes an vital part of the city's talent attraction—not through ads, but through personal experience. It can point applicants to positions and options that would not otherwise have heard about the city. By creating authentic encounters with the city, the residency positions the city as a place where people not only work, but also want to belong. The residency can lead applicants to options that they would not otherwise have heard about.

A Residency That's Shared

This isn't an organisation's residency. It's the city's. A core principle of this model is distribution—of hosting, of ownership, of storytelling.

Over 70 local organisations participated in Malmö Residency 2025, ranging from startups and corporates to cultural institutions. Some hosted events. Others offered desks or mentorship. Some simply said: "We're behind this."

One of the most meaningful things you can do is host something together. This isn't just 'my party'—it's ours.

"The city itself almost becomes a friend to you."

– Resident

A Residency That's Open and Open-Ended

There is no required outcome. No final product. Just people, time, space—and the trust that something valuable will emerge. The concept of a city-wide residency isn't about deliverables. It's about encounters. The only expectation is engagement.

That said, effects can still be measured to some extent: in the number of applicants, in the global reach of participants, and in the range of local stakeholders who become involved. These indicators matter—but they are secondary.

We believe things happen when they happen—not always on command. This open-endedness is perhaps the boldest feature. It trusts the process. It trusts people. And trust— in a world obsessed with metrics—might be the most radical infrastructure of all.

A Basis for Mutual Value

The residency isn't just a sabbatical. It's a shared exchange. Hosts open their doors, offer their time and networks. Residents bring ideas, experiences, and expertise. Themes help ensure there's a mutual professional curiosity at the center of those exchanges.

It's still a professional residency. We're hoping they'll engage deeply, and that the local community can learn from them too.

Step-by-Step Guide to a Residency Program

Define and Anchor

There is something quietly radical in the act of welcoming people not just into your city, but into its rhythms, its tensions, its conversations. A residency can be an invitation—not to consume a place, or even to solve its problems, but to live within it, gently and curiously, for a time.

Start with 'why us?'. Before anything else, get clear on why your city, town, or region should host a residency like this. What's unique about your place — its energy, talent, needs, gaps, mood? What might it offer visitors beyond the obvious?

And just as importantly: What might it gain in return?

Maybe it's about attracting global talent. Maybe it's about creating new kinds of learning spaces. Maybe it's about showing your community — and the world — that your city is open.

Funding

You'll need some financial support — not massive, but meaningful. Typical costs might include project management, communication and design, resident travel and accommodation, events and gatherings, documentation (film, photo, sound, etc).

You might not cover it all yourself — that's the beauty of shared ownership. Partners might contribute time, space, visibility, or even sponsorship. It's not always about big money. It's about shared purpose.

We also started imagining frameworks for distributed hosting: small microgrants for hosts, clearer descriptions of what support could look like, a shared check-in ritual every week. Perhaps even a lightweight governance model—not hierarchical, but relational. Something that allows multiple organisations to co-hold the experience without burning out.

The city, when it works, hosts in layers. Formal institutions. Curious citizens. Coffee shop owners. Strangers at bus stops. But for that to happen at scale, we need infrastructure—both social and material—that supports generosity without overloading it.

A Collaborative Effort

It isn't a service. It's a shared project.

You'll need organisations and individuals willing to serve as hosts. These aren't just venues or companies—they're connectors. They believe in the value of exchange, and are open to welcoming people from elsewhere into their day-to-day.

Start small. Talk to companies, institutions, coworking spaces, cultural hubs, city departments. Ask: What would you be curious to learn from international guests? What can you offer—space, time, conversations, mentorship? Would you like to be part of something bigger?

In Malmö, we had over 70 organisations by the time we launched. But that started with a few conversations, a bit of belief, and a lot of trust.

And so a breadth of the city became a host—not just the organisers or institutions, but the streets, the routines, the people encountered by chance. A city-wide residency becomes a living structure for people to meet, listen, reflect, and make sense together.

Checklist Define and Anchor

Define purpose and goals
Seek funding
Start recruting hosting organisations

Structure, Invitation and Selection

Build a Core Team

You'll need a project lead—someone who wakes up thinking about this—and someone to handle communication. If possible, partner with a platform or organisation that already works across sectors. That credibility will help rally others.

Don't overcomplicate. Keep it nimble. Focus on coordination and care.

Don't start from scratch. Piggyback on what already exists. In Malmö, the residency was led by the community-owned non-profit organisation Media Evolution, overlapped with Southern Sweden Design Days and other events already generating energy in the city.

Look at your calendar. Are there festivals, seasons, or conferences that already bring attention or expertise? Aligning the residency with those moments adds visibility and depth—momentum.

Call for Residents

Every residency begins with an invitation. Not just to apply, but to imagine: What could I become here? What does this place want from me? What do I hope to give?

We kept the invitation open-ended on purpose. We weren't looking for people with the most prestigious portfolios. We were looking for resonance. Curiosity. A capacity to hold uncertainty. We wanted people who wouldn't just "do" a residency, but who might grow with it, and contribute to its furthering.

The call was simple: Spend four weeks in Malmö. Get to know the city. Explore a theme alongside others. Follow what feels alive. There was no single output required—just the shared intention to participate, connect, and reflect.

> "It will bring very long cultural bridges between cities and people."
>
> – Hosting organisation

Need-based Themes

Still, even the most open invitation has a shape and format. While the City-Wide Residency is inclusive by design, it's also purposeful. It's not just about who wants to come—it's about creating the conditions for meaningful matches between the residents and the place.

This is where themes come in.

In Malmö, five broad themes were used: **AI and Emergent Technologies, Food Innovation, Wise and Digital Cities, Cultural and Creative Industries,** and **Green Transition**. These weren't randomly chosen—they were based on real needs and future interests identified by the community of hosting organisations.

We spoke with local companies about what kinds of competencies they'll need in the next five years. The themes emerged from those conversations. It's a way of aligning the call for residents with the city's trajectory.

They served as loose containers, offering a starting point without prescribing an outcome.

Rather than requesting long proposals, focus on questions that reveal mindset: Why are you interested in this residency? How does your work connect to one or more of the themes? What are you hoping to learn, share, or explore? Tell us about a time you meaningfully embedded in a new place.

Keep it concise—people shouldn't need a full day to apply. But make the questions thoughtful. That's how you attract thoughtful people.

Having themes gives the residency focus—not as a filter, but as a frame. It's not about excluding those who don't fit, but about helping people—applicants and hosts alike—find the right context for collaboration.

For the hosts, it also gives clarity: What kind of conversations do we want to have? What kind of talent or inspiration are we hoping to meet? And for the residents, it provides an invitation: You're welcome here—especially if your thinking aligns with these directions.

The key is to keep themes broad, yet distinct. Too narrow, and you risk excluding great applicants. Too loose, and you lose the sense of focus.

In Malmö's case, even within each theme, applicants came from wildly different backgrounds—seasoned journalists in the intersection of culture and technology, green investment specialists, experimental thinkers and publishers, biologists, engineers, and ecological entrepreneurs. That diversity within the themes is part of the magic.

Communications

Give the residency an identity that stands on its own — one that people want to be part of. In Malmö's case, it wasn't hosted under the project lead's brand. It was the Malmö Residency. Create a visual identity. Build a simple, welcoming website. Tell a clear story: This city is ready for something new — and you're invited.

Prepare content for social media and make use of all the hosting organisations communications channels to collectively spread the word.

Selection Process

The application process itself also became a kind of co-design. Through conversations with local partners and interviews with residents, the contours of the residency began to sharpen. It became clear that what mattered wasn't just who was selected, but how they were held—and by whom.

Once applications come in, you'll want a way to review and shortlist candidates by theme or potential fit. Work with your host organisations to identify which profiles spark curiosity. Focus on potential, not perfection.

Remember: this isn't a hiring process. You're building a cohort—a mix of thinkers, makers, doers, and dreamers who can learn from each other and from the city.

We didn't pick just the 'most impressive' people. We picked the ones who made us curious. That was our main criteria: Would we want to spend a month with this person?

"It's good to be a part of this program as a private company. It gives us a closeness to the city's talent attraction"

– Hosting organisation

In Malmö, themes helped navigate an overwhelming response— 868 applications from 88 countries. By shortlisting candidates within each theme, the organisers could better match individuals to interested host organisations.Designing the invitation, then, is not just about choosing who comes. It's about shaping the emotional architecture they'll enter. A structure with enough openness for surprise, and enough holding for people to feel safe within the unknown.

Checklist Structure, Invitation and Selection

Establish a project team
Define the time period
Define themes with hosting organisations
Create communications platform
Communicate the call for Residents
Make a short list of Residents
Conduct interviews with people on the shortlist
Select Residents
Book travel and accommodation

Programming and Execution

A residency doesn't have to be heavy to be meaningful. Ours was intentionally light-touch—more scaffold than script, more atmosphere than agenda. We created a loose weekly rhythm with optional gatherings, shared meals, open hours, and moments for reflection. Enough to build cohesion, but never too much to crowd the space for spontaneity.

The most powerful structures were the quietest ones. A WhatsApp group that buzzed with invitations and check-ins. A rental bike that became a symbol of mobility and ease. A dining table that hosted more than one late-night conversation that shifted something in someone.

Building the Program

Think in layers, not a linear schedule. Instead of building a rigid calendar, think of the program as a set of layers:

Personal Exploration
Each resident sets their own intentions. They explore the city, connect with people, and follow their curiosity.

Thematic Touchpoints
Gatherings around the residency's core themes: public seminars, hosted lunches, or field visits—sometimes curated, sometimes improvised.

Shared Moments
Social glue matters. Design time for the group to bond: dinners, walks, game nights, or just a shared workspace.

Open Invitations
Allow residents to host something of their own: a talk, workshop, performance, or casual show-and-tell. This isn't a demand—it's an offer.

Mid-Point Check-In
Halfway through, host a relaxed reflection session. Ask: What's resonating? What are you noticing about this place—or yourself? What's missing? It's not a performance review. It's a way to help residents shape the second half of their stay.

The Formation of a Group

Once residents were selected, we focused on soft landings. Before everybody arrived we hosted a video call for everybody to introduce themselves to each other, ask questions and get practicalities sorted. A pre-survey was conducted to reflect on expectations.

Upon arrival there was a welcome dinner, a group bike ride, and a WhatsApp thread. These weren't just logistics—they were signals. Signals that this was a place for co-presence, not performance.

From our experience, we saw that participation would vary. Some residents could fully immerse; others had to maintain work obligations in other time zones. Many worked remotely with their ordinary jobs while trying to stay present in Malmö.

This tension became a gift of sorts, or an opportunity to reflect, pointing us toward new modes of participation—fractional, flexible, asynchronous. Not everyone needs the same amount of time or attention, but everyone needs clarity.

Staying Responsive to Emerging Needs

And then there was the matter of support. Though the residency was designed to be decentralised, much of the hosting still landed on the core team of the project lead. We were the ones with the funding, the time, the WhatsApp threads, and the calendar invites. Naturally, the gravitational pull came back to us.

This was both a strength and a limitation. Residents trusted us, leaned on us, gathered around us—but it risked bottlenecking their experience. In hindsight, assigning each resident a "local anchor" could have created more distributed care. These wouldn't be supervisors, just guides—people who could help orient, connect, and check in.

What emerged, most of all, was a sense that the program itself was the people. The way they related, the way they adapted, the way they listened. Our role was to create just enough structure to make those dynamics possible—then step back.

Decompressing

We learned quickly that social intensity needs counterweight. "People seemed totally drained," a member of the team noted, "not necessary in a bad way—just completely socially saturated." Between remote work, new relationships, and being in constant discovery mode, many residents reached the edge of their social energy early on.

So we adjust. Future versions, we realise, need intentional decompression—slow mornings, optional days, spaces to retreat. Over-programming doesn't just exhaust people; it narrows their capacity to be fully present when it matters most.

"It is a rare mix of professionalism and warmth, where creativity grows in a truly caring environment."

- Resident

Checklist Programming and Execution

Create a program with mandatory social activities
Make a list of professional events to attend
Encourage hosting organisations to book meetings with Residents
Conduct a pre-survey
Schedule a video call with participants before the Residency period
Establish a WhatsApp group for Residents
Make space for decompression

Aftercare and Measuring Impact

What does success look like when there's no strict agenda? When residents aren't expected to produce a report, a product, or a performance? For the city-wide residency, the answer is simple, but not small: meaningful connection.

The value of a residency like this can be hard to quantify in advance—and that's intentional. This isn't a startup accelerator or a short-term consultancy. It's an invitation to live, work, and wonder in context. Sometimes what matters most is what you didn't plan for.

Value the Unmeasurable

One of the hardest things to do in a residency is to stop asking, "What will come out of this?" It's a natural question—especially for funders, institutions, and organisers. But it can also flatten the experience into a transaction: time in, output out.

From the beginning, we tried to resist this. There were no required deliverables. No final presentation. No exhibition. The residency was framed as a space for inquiry, reflection, and connection. Of course things emerged—ideas, prototypes, relationships—but they weren't the measure of success.

Still, there are tangible ripple effects: Residents find future collaborators or even future homes. Hosts gain new perspectives on their work or field. Local professionals are reminded that their city is part of something larger.

One of the more subtle—but powerful—movements in perspective is the way residencies like this shift perceptions of place. When someone from Japan or Nigeria or the Netherlands spends a month working in your city—and shares their experience—that can have a far-reaching impact. Malmö is not a "major" city on paper. But when residents left, they didn't say it was small—they said it was generous, surprising, connected, and alive.

We also started looking at different ways to track impact. Not KPIs or charts, but stories. Did someone see their neighbourhood differently? Did a local host stay in touch with a resident? Did something quiet but meaningful shift in someone's work?

One resident didn't finish the project they came to explore. But they made a new friend who challenged their thinking in unexpected ways. Another started a collaboration that wouldn't surface for months. Another simply said, "This gave me time to think differently."

That was enough.

Reach

Although the residency is all about the people participating, a residency program has a larger impact and gets attention through the call for participation and journalists covering it. Therefore, make sure to gather statistics from social media channels of hosting organisations, newsletter reach and website traffic.

It's worth measuring what you can: reach and how many people heard about the residency, engagement and how many organisations participated, integration and how many residents connected meaningfully with locals, and perception and how did residents describe the city after leaving.

Intentional Ending

Too often, residencies finish with a final event—an exhibition, a talk, a photo recap. That can be fine. There is something deeper in the soft endings: a closing sit-down. A group reflection with no agenda other than gratitude.

Think about it as “aftercare,” and treat it as seriously as onboarding.

Ask each resident a few questions in the final week: What surprised you? What stayed with you? What do you want to carry forward? The answers weren’t strategic, but they were honest. They helped us understand not just what happened—but what mattered.

Post-Survey

Send a short post-survey to residents and host organisations. Keep it practical but open-ended: What was most valuable? What felt confusing or challenging? What would you like to stay in touch about? Would you recommend this to someone else?

The real metric is whether people want to come back. Or stay. These answers don’t just help you improve — they help you tell the story later. Document these in quotes, short videos, or illustrated recaps. These are the assets that travel.

Team Reflection

Reflect as a team. Take time to debrief. Ask: What surprised us? What felt like the most powerful moments? Where did we overwork something that didn’t matter? What would we change next time?

This builds your own institutional learning, and it honors the energy you’ve invested.

Post-Reflection with Residents

Learning often takes time to sink in. As project manager for the Residency you can hold space for participants to stay connected as a group. Schedule a video call and ask the group to share what behaviours they started or ended, how their time in your city has changed their practice, and if they are still in contact with people they met during their Residency.

> “I've been impressed with how connected the ecosystem seems to be here and that people are very welcoming and will instantly connect you to loads of people”
>
> – Resident

Checklist Aftercare and Measuring Impact

Be intentional with how it ends
Conduct a post-survey
Measure reach
Host reflection sessions

Long-Term Ripples

The program ends. The relationships don't.

Some Residents returned to Malmö months later. Others stayed in touch. One ended up joining another residency in a different city, bringing this model with them. The idea of replication became less important than resonance. The residency didn't need to scale. It needed to ripple.

What began as a time-limited program became a constellation—a pattern of relationships that could light up in new ways over time. No one owns it. Everyone shapes it. The most powerful part is not what happens during the month—but what continues after it.

We're building soft infrastructure. The kind that makes a city feel open, curious, and alive. This is what a residency plants: not only ideas, but relationships. And in that, we saw a glimpse of what city-making could be. Not an outcome. A practice.

"Malmö Residency is a monthlong immersion into a community full of inspiring people and organisations, a place and time for you to co-explore what you are passionate about and what you want to contribute to others."

- Resident

MADE

This playbook draws from the experiences of conceptualising, organising and hosting Malmö Residency 2025 – a city-wide residency in which the business community of Malmö invited eight persons from around the world to spend a spring month in Sweden's third-biggest city.

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