# THE NORWEGIAN CREATIVE LAND TRUST

## Securing Land and Space for Norway's Creative Future.

A vision for the next 100 years

*Prepared by:*
A dedicated working group facilitated by Kulturrom

# PROVOCATION

### Why this matters now

Every town needs places where people meet across the lines that usually keep them apart — where a teenager picking up an instrument for the first time shares a building with an arts professional, where a debate about a new production spills into the foyer, where someone looking for work finds paid hours building a set. Where a community can gather with no presumptions for courses, classes and coffee. These are not by-products of cultural activity; they are the point of it. Rehearsal rooms, workshops and stages are the physical infrastructure of belonging, of trying things out, of being wrong in public and getting better at something. A community that loses such spaces does not simply become culturally quieter — it becomes less inventive, less able to absorb newcomers, and less able to disagree productively with itself.

The economics are working against these outcomes right now. Public cultural funding in Norway is not going to rise significantly in the years ahead, while commercial rents keep climbing. That combination is not neutral — it only leaves room for culture that can pay market rent. Unless we invest deliberately in the infrastructure that keeps space affordable over time, we will lose activity that is very hard to rebuild once it's gone — not through any single decision, but through a thousand individually reasonable ones.

### What's in it for us?

For a local politician, this is a rare opportunity to leave something that outlasts an election cycle and creates a legacy. A building keeps delivering activity, jobs and community long after opening, without needing to be re-funded, re-argued and re-justified every four years. For a savings bank foundation or corporate foundation, it's a way to put capital into a visible, local, long-term asset rather than another one-off grant that needs replacing next year. For the state, no country has created a national instrument like this that enhances decentralisation, diversity, and participation across the board. This is a path to demonstrate Norway’s global leadership. For local cultural life itself, the gain is the most basic one: secure ground. Predictability of rent, tenure, and long-term access is what allows an organisation to plan five or ten years ahead rather than surviving from one lease renewal to the next. In every case, the idea of creating the Creative Land Trust Norway isn't asking for subsidy — it's offering a structure (co-owner, guarantor, long-lease partner) that protects the value of the investment itself, and the security of the people using the building, not just this year's activity. This is about changing what matters, what Norway focuses on as it develops its economy long into the future, and ensuring what happens is done for, by and in communities, and driven by local decision-makers along the way.

# EXPLANATION IN ONE PAGE

The "Creative Land Trust Norway" (Working title) is a new instrument – a permanent, nationally anchored foundation that can step in as a partner where municipalities, the cultural sector and property developers want to work together on long-term solutions.

Think of it a little like Husbanken, the Norwegian State Housing Bank – with guarantees and financial instruments that unlock both private and public funding. A little like Statsbygg, the government's property agency, with professional expertise in operations and space management. But even more solution-oriented and closer to local actors than municipalities can be on their own.

- Municipalities own land and buildings, but often lack the capacity to develop and operate cultural infrastructure on their own (beyond their core responsibilities such as libraries, municipal schools of music and the arts, and so on).
- Property developers are increasingly seeking projects with social and cultural value – but need a professional partner who can share risk, identify the right tenants and secure long-term activity.
- Cultural actors have both the ability and the willingness to pay but cannot compete on commercial market terms, and capital must be raised to upgrade each building.

The Creative Land Trust idea addresses this by stepping in as an active partner in various roles – as co-owner, guarantor or owner/long-lease – tailored to each individual project and financed through a combination of public grants, donations from savings banks and corporate foundations, and private capital.

# PART 1: Executive Summary

Over the past year, those of us who have produced this vision have travelled across Norway and held detailed conversations with dozens of organisations in Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and Kristiansand. We have met cultural operators, municipalities, foundations, planners, artists, and elected officials. We have listened carefully and heard a consistent story.

Rents are rising. Artists are being priced out and displaced. Municipalities are short-term in their thinking on cultural property. There is no national framework keeping cultural infrastructure in cultural hands. The creative economy is treated as a series of one-off projects rather than as long-term infrastructure for the country.

This document is the synthesis of those conversations and our proposed response: to establish a "Creative Land Trust Norway," a new way to help set up a model that works locally, and also may acquire, hold, and steward real estate assets in perpetuity for the benefit of Norway's creative and cultural sectors, with a particular focus on cultural production — recording studios, rehearsal spaces, artist studios, and creative-led workspaces.

The Creative Land Trust responds to a structural market failure. Rising property values, speculative development, and commercial pressures across Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and other Norwegian cities are eroding the affordable studios, production spaces, and venues that the creative economy depends on.

Øveriet in Oslo, with 76 rehearsal rooms and 1,300 users, has a waiting list of more than 440 bands. Musikkbyen in Trondheim reports similar pressures. Costs are rising, access is declining, and while the creative economy's potential as an economic driver continues to grow globally — increasing at 6% per annum — Norway is showing signs of stagnation. In 2023, 93,600 people were employed in the cultural and creative industries; by 2024, that figure had fallen to 92,800, according to Statistics Norway (SSB).

What the figures do not show is the production layer beneath them. As Elisabeth Høsflot Klæbo, board member of NiT's *fagråd*, put it: "Hvis vi ikke har verksteder, atelierer og finansiering underveis, så blir det heller ingen kunst" — "without workshops, studios, and financing along the way, there will be no art either" (*Adresseavisen*, 16 April 2026). The 440 bands on Øveriet's waiting list, and the parallel pressure at Musikkbyen in Trondheim, are signals that this layer is being challenged.

At the same time, Norway recognises — historically, financially, and structurally — the value of culture. We believe this recognition can be used strategically and intentionally to address several issues at once: affordability, access, stronger communities, and securing common space for the next hundred years.

Models that demonstrate the potential of such an approach already exist. Bergen Kjøtt, where the city established a *stiftelse* and helped acquire the building, and TOU Scene in Stavanger, where the old brewery was bought and secured for the long term by the city and

operated by an independent entity (TOU ideelt AS), both show what is possible. But these initiatives are single examples and ad hoc. They lack a national, joined-up approach that can accelerate the growth of culture as an economic good in Norway.

The model we propose here is exactly that joined-up approach: a hybrid partnership between a national agency (Kulturrom/Kulturdirektoratet), other national organisations, municipal government, private and philanthropic partners, and local delivery operators. It is designed to work in the Norwegian context first and foremost, but is informed by best practice abroad — from Creative Land Trusts in San Francisco, London, Seattle, and Austin.

This vision outlines what the Trust is, how it will work, who will be involved, and why it matters — so that we can build a thriving, liveable, and diverse country for the long term. In perpetuity, not in budget cycles.

> *"Creative Land Trusts empower cultural organisations to take their fate into their own hands through property ownership and stable leasing."*
>
> *— Shelley Trott, Executive Director, Kenneth Rainin Foundation (Creative Land Trusts: A Practical Guide)*

## Why This Matters: Investing in Norway's Creative Future

Norway already has cultural buildings operating on principles similar to the Trust model. USF Verftet in Bergen is owned by a holding company shared between Bergen *kommune* (45%), the private property company EGD Property (50%), and Stiftelsen Kulturhuset USF (5%), and has been a major cultural production house for decades. Bergen Kjøtt was established as a foundation with start-up capital from Bergen *kommune* and operates a multi-use cultural building offering below-market rents to artists. Det Umulige Huset in Rauma is jointly owned by the municipality, the local business council, and a regional rock festival.

Beyond the major cities, smaller towns demonstrate what is possible at every scale. **HeArtBox** in Lillehammer — a new creative production house for young people aged 15–25 — was transformed into what its operators describe as a "creative power station" through a partnership between Sparebankstiftelsen DNB, Kulturrom, Sparebank 1 Gudbrandsdal, the building owner SGF Eiendom, and a network of contractors who contributed their work. The building is operated by the non-profit *Kulturhjerte*, separating property stewardship from day-to-day operations — exactly the model the Trust proposes. It operates a transparent two-tier pricing structure, with cultural users charged roughly half the rate for commercial bookings, and hosts both municipal youth services (BOXN, run by Lillehammer *kommune*) and professional cultural production under the same roof. HeArtbox is a case showcasing what is possible, but its long-term success is not secured. Despite all the investment in the premises, *Kulturhjerte* does not own the building in perpetuity and pays rent. It benefits from a munificent and supportive landlord, one that invested over 7m NOK into the building to refurbish it, but it is hard to plan for the long term if such munificence isn't there. A change of ownership, for example, could lead to structural issues. But the success of what HeArtBox is, in microcosm, is what the Trust could standardise and scale: a hybrid public-philanthropic

capital stack, an independent non-profit operator, transparent two-tier affordability, and an explicit social-inclusion purpose.

These models have emerged one by one, through long local processes, without a shared framework to support them. Our mission is to unify, formalise, and expand them — and to make Norway the first country in the world to do so at a national scale.

This is not charity, and this is not new money. It is a way of spending existing public expenditure differently. Norway already invests significant public funds in culture — through grants, rent subsidies, and the maintenance of buildings that are often underused or vacant. The Trust consolidates that spend into long-term infrastructure that compounds in value rather than disappearing in annual budget cycles. Vacant municipal buildings are not neutral; they cost their owners money to hold and produce nothing in return. Putting them into cultural stewardship is the lowest-risk way to turn a liability into productive infrastructure.

There is one further parallel worth drawing. Almost every Norwegian household already invests in property through savings accounts at the *Sparebanker*, pension contributions, and indirectly through the Government Pension Fund. We invest in property because property is stable, durable, and grows in value. It is tangible, and it isn't going away. The Trust offers a way for that same instinct toward patient, long-term property investment to also build the cultural infrastructure on which the next century's creative economy depends.

## This is an investment in common infrastructure

In the past, Norway built its sovereign wealth from oil and prosperity from fish. The next century's wealth is in creativity — and we should invest in it the same way. The long-term, sustainable future of Norway's prosperity does not lie in its seas, on its land, or deep beneath the ground. It lies in the creativity and entrepreneurship of its citizens. Yet in Norway, culture is not historically associated with economic goals. The potential of a creative job is less well understood than that of a job in energy, agriculture, or fisheries. The result is a lack of recognition of what is needed to create and sustain those jobs and why they matter.

We believe the creative economies are Norway's long-term economic superpower. But to leverage them, we need to treat them differently — as both an economic good and a cultural right. That means understanding what the creative economy is, how it works, what it needs to grow, how to measure it, and how to unlock its potential.

Right now, this is lacking. The result is a challenging environment for creative practitioners and businesses, and despite significant public expenditure on the arts, the places and spaces that incubate creatives are struggling in both cities and the countryside. This has little to do with supply and demand.

We believe this needs to change. That is what we are offering here.

# PART 2: National Policy Alignment

Before we explain how the Cultural Land Trust would work, we want to show how it builds on and complements existing policy. Below, we outline the policy objectives that the Trust can help deliver.

## Norway's Music Policy

*NOU Musikklandet* (2025) documents that cultural producers consistently rely on older industrial and office buildings with low rent, but are priced out as those areas become more attractive. The Trust's mission is to address precisely this. The study also recommends:

- **Securing diverse and innovative arts activities.** The Trust will increase access to physical infrastructure — permanently affordable studios, workshops, and production spaces that artists require to sustain creative practice over the long term — directly supporting the Ministry's objective of securing diverse artistic activity.
- **Supporting the creative industries as an economic sector.** The Trust provides a stable, affordable foundation for creative enterprises to grow, innovate, and contribute to value creation.
- **Cultural policy in a post-petroleum economy.** As the Norwegian economy transitions away from petroleum dependence, the creative industries are increasingly recognised as a source of future economic potential. The Trust will be a key delivery agent to ensure this transition takes place now and over the long term.
- **Inclusivity and access.** Norwegian cultural policy emphasises making arts and culture accessible to all citizens regardless of socio-economic background. The Trust's community governance model and below-market lease structures ensure that creative opportunities are not restricted to those who can afford commercial market rents.

## Norwegian Cultural Spaces Study and the Cultural Act (Kulturloven)

The new Norwegian Cultural Act (*Kulturloven*) now requires municipalities to produce a written assessment of cultural sector status and development needs as a basis for their planning work. Trondheim City Council has gone further, deciding that art and culture must be written into the regulatory provisions for all relevant future detailed plans in the Nyhavna development area — using planning law strategically to secure cultural production amid a major urban transformation.

## National Innovation and Enterprise Policy

Innovation Norway identifies Creative Industries and Tourism as a priority sector. The Research Council of Norway supports innovation projects containing significant elements of industrial research and experimental development.

## National Responsible Investment and Ethical Finance Policy

Norway's Government Pension Fund Global, the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, has established global benchmarks for responsible and sustainable investment. The Trust's model of removing creative property from speculative markets aligns with Norway's broader commitment to ensuring that financial structures serve the long-term public interest. Over time, its reporting and impact assessments will demonstrate increased circular economy and social benefits around the buildings it owns and operates.

## Norway's Land Use, Planning and Building Act

Norway's Plan and Building Act (§11-7) defines the categories that govern all land-use planning. Sport has its own dedicated category as *idrettsanlegg*. Shopping centres, tourism, and several types of business have their own. Cultural production does not. It must be placed under the broad category *bebyggelse for offentlig eller privat tjenesteyting* — together with offices and general service functions.

This means cultural production has no automatic visibility in the legal framework. Planners are not required to designate space for it, and the category provides no basis for protecting cultural production when development pressure rises.

The absence of a category has two consequences. A designation of its own works as a threshold against disappearance: converting a sports facility to other uses requires rezoning, with public consultation, a political decision and a right of appeal, whereas a cultural venue can be replaced by offices through a change of use application the municipality is, as a rule, obliged to approve. The closure of a sports facility is a political question. The closure of a cultural venue is a transaction between an owner and a building authority.

The category also sets the price. Property is valued based on what the plan permits, not on what currently stands there, so a cultural operator has to outbid a developer working under that assumption at a price cultural activity cannot bear. Planning law can address this, but only in advance. Trondheim's city council decided in 2024 that art and culture must be written into the zoning provisions of all relevant future detailed plans for Nyhavna. Aarhus sold a site in Sydhavnskvarteret on condition that the project accommodate culture and cultural production, and differentiated its planning fees so that zoning for culture costs less than zoning for housing or commercial use. Berlin stopped selling municipal land altogether, allocating it instead through long leaseholds awarded by concept competition rather than by the highest bid.

These provisions secure the intention. They do not secure the building. A reservation of space for culture still requires someone able to acquire that space, hold it, and let it on terms cultural production can bear, over decades rather than lease periods. That is the function the Trust performs. Where such provisions exist, the Trust is the mechanism that delivers them. Where they do not, it secures the premises directly.

# PART 3: How It Will Work

The Creative Land Trust will serve two distinct but aligned roles. First, it will operate as a not-for-profit real estate organisation, with a mission to acquire, support, sustain, and manage or co-own real estate for the sole purpose of supporting creative and cultural development. This is its core mission: buy or support partners to buy land, protect buildings, and support creatives. Alongside this, it will serve as a data and research hub, building robust national datasets to support the Trust's development, operations, and long-term vision, all of which will be free and accessible to everyone involved.

Below is a description of the model, including its overall structure and management, ownership pathways, and proposed financial model.

## Overall Structure and Management

The Norwegian Creative Land Trust will operate as a hybrid partnership, anchored by Kulturrom in an initial phase, and will be run in formal partnership with a national network of cultural organisations, municipalities, and local delivery operators. This structure reflects Norway's governance culture and addresses the absence of deep philanthropic traditions by combining public, institutional, private, and community capital.

Three core principles guide the structure throughout.

1. It acts only in concert with local actors and must be invited in.
2. It does not get involved in any local decision regarding programming, space or editorial.
3. Its research and data are meant to support the broader sector, within and outside of the Trust.

The Trust has four partner groups, with a National Agency assuming day-to-day administrative responsibility on behalf of the partnership.

### National Agency (Kulturrom/Kulturdirektoratet and aligned partners)

**Role:** institutional anchor, corporate governance and compliance manager, and investment vehicle. Acts on behalf of the partner network, not in place of it.

- Serves as the founding body and operational backbone of the Trust
- Brings established expertise in cultural space investment through its existing projects and expertise
- Manages the Trust at the national level, establishes local relationships, and disburses funds.
- Provides the governance framework, evaluation methodology, and quality assurance for acquisitions and operations.
- Coordinates the national network of partner organisations and local Trust councils across cities.

### Municipal and County Government (Kommune for Fylkeskommune)

**Role:** property contributor, planning enabler, and co-investor. The Trust is built to **enable** municipal action, not to displace municipal responsibility — municipalities retain a seat at the table on every property in their jurisdiction.

- Contributes vacant or underutilised municipally owned buildings to the Trust via long-term lease, transfer, or co-ownership arrangement.
- Provides planning and regulatory support, including required zoning, protections for cultural spaces, and integration with municipal master plans.
- Makes direct capital grants available via existing programmes.
- Retains a seat on the local Creative Land Trust Council to ensure democratic accountability.

### Private and Philanthropic Partners

**Role:** capital providers, impact investors, and community connectors.

- *Sparebankstiftelser* (e.g., Sparebankstiftelsen DNB) and other Norwegian foundations provide philanthropic capital for acquisition and rehabilitation.
- Private impact investors — aligned with Norway's ethical finance tradition and the Government Pension Fund Global's responsible investment principles — provide patient capital.
- Corporate partners contribute through sponsorship, in-kind support, or direct investment.
- Property developers, existing land owners and trusts, who could own, co-own and lease to the Trust

### Local Delivery Partners and Operators

**Role:** on-the-ground management and community activation.

In each community, the Trust will establish a relationship with an existing operator (or network of them) with the knowledge and expertise to manage the building in that specific place, tailored to its local context. That operator will then manage the Land Trust property and serve as the local 'node' for the national organisation.

This separates property stewardship (the Trust) from operational management (the operator), following the model used by London's Creative Land Trust. The Musikkontoret network is one such partner that will be explored. Another is Pådriv, but a roster of suitable organisations will be drafted and maintained.

## How the Trust Will Operate as a Legal Entity

The Trust will be established as an *allmennyttig stiftelse / Ideelt AS or forening, depending on the most suitable model and partners in accordance with the mandate.* Its articles of association will state that:

- It can hold land and property in perpetuity, under the governance of an independent board.
- It cannot distribute profits; all surpluses must be reinvested in the Trust's mission.
- It can receive public grants, philanthropic donations, and impact investment.

## Governance Structure

A Norwegian Creative Land Trust  should have a national board and, in the cities and places where it acquires buildings, a regional or local advisory council.

### National Board

Nine to eleven members, representing all four partner groups as well as specialists. The board will include an artist seat to ensure consistent representation of artists. It is legally responsible for the Creative Land Trust Norway, annual reporting, corporate governance, auditing, compliance, and brand development.

### Regional or Local Advisory Council

- Established in each city where the Trust holds property (initially Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen and some smaller cities depending on buildings and local engagement).
- Five to seven members, chaired by a representative of the local operator: creative community representatives, tenant representatives, municipality representatives, and local business and cultural partners.
- Responsible for tenant selection criteria, programming priorities, community engagement, local partnership development, and operational oversight.
- Reports to the National Board but retains autonomy on local programming and tenant mix decisions.
- Uses a reporting structure created and managed by the national organization.

### Operating Partners

The Trust will appoint professional creative space operators to manage day-to-day building operations, tenant relations, and maintenance. This separates property stewardship (the Trust) from operational management (the operator).

### Editorial Independence

The Trust holds buildings; it does not programme them or decide what usage, art form or structure is best. This is the decision of local experts. Programming decisions sit with local operators and the Regional and Local Advisory Councils. The Trust takes no editorial position beyond a commitment to cultural production and community benefit, expressed through tenant selection and social impact criteria. This protects against institutional capture, removes 'editorial risk' for funders and municipalities, and ensures that the Trust serves as infrastructure — not as a curator, programmer, or gatekeeper.

## Ownership Pathways

The hybrid four-party model is designed to create multiple pathways for bringing properties into the Trust, depending on local circumstances. We have identified the following options.

### Primary Model: Municipal Transfer or Long-Term Lease

This is the preferred acquisition pathway, especially for the initial portfolio.

- A municipality or regional authority contributes a vacant or underutilised property to the Trust, either through outright transfer or a long-term ground lease (typically 40–99 years at peppercorn rent).
- The Trust, or partners with the Trust, secures finance to invest in rehabilitation and fit-out through blended finance, involving foundation and developer partners.

### Alternative Pathways to Securing Assets

Where the primary pathway is not available, the Trust will pursue one of the following models.

| Model | How It Works | When to Use |
|---|---|---|
| Co-Ownership with City or State | Joint ownership between the Trust and the municipality. The city retains partial equity; the Trust holds the cultural-use obligation. Income and costs are split by agreement, with the Trust holding the long-term cultural mission. | When a full transfer is politically or financially impractical, or when the city wants to retain a stake in the asset. |
| Long-Term Ground Lease | The Trust secures a long-term 'peppercorn' ground lease from a benevolent landowner — public, private, or institutional — at nominal rent in exchange for stewarding the building. | When outright ownership is not possible, but a willing landowner exists; useful for heritage assets and institutional partners. |
| Developer Partnership | The Trust partners with a private developer on a new build or major renovation. Cultural space is delivered as part of the development under permanent Trust ownership or long lease, with the developer benefiting through density bonuses, planning gain, or reputation. | New-build mixed-use developments and urban regeneration areas (e.g., Nyhavna in Trondheim). |
| Leie-til-Eie (Rent-to-Own) | A pioneering model: a genuine partnership with a property developer, where rent payments convert into ownership over time — for the cultural operator, the municipality, or Creative Land Trust | When the Trust lacks upfront capital but has stable operational income; suitable for incremental transfer of municipal assets. |

| Model | How It Works | When to Use |
|---|---|---|
| Open Market Purchase | The Trust acquires property on the open market using blended finance (grants, loans, philanthropy, and impact capital). | Strategic acquisitions where no municipal property is available; requires a pre-approved capital facility and a willing seller. |
| Guarantor Model | The Norwegian Creative Land Trust can act as guarantor for loans or lease obligations, providing risk assurance for lenders and opportunities for existing, vetted local operators | When the existing operator wants to own the building themselves but requires additional liquidity or support |

## Modular Building Scenarios

We recognise there is no one-size-fits-all here, so our vision is for the Trust to be designed, over time, to operate at multiple scales, from a single repurposed building in a major city to a smaller building in a rural municipality. However, to structure investments, budgets and our data collection objectives, we will compartmentalise our initiatives within three size categories:

| | Large Campus | Mid-Size Facility | Small / Neighbourhood |
|---|---|---|---|
| Example | Gamle Munch, Oslo | Nyhavna space, Trondheim | Neighbourhood cultural house |
| Floor Area | 2,000+ sqm | 500–2,000 sqm | Under 500 sqm |
| Tenant Mix | 30–70+ studios; rehearsal rooms, recording studios, maker spaces, co-working, performance space. | 10–30 studios; focused on 2–3 disciplines; shared facilities. | 3–10 studios; community rehearsal and meeting space; grassroots programming. |
| Governance | Full Local Trust Council; professional operator; dedicated site manager. | Local Trust Council; part-time management or operator partnership. | Managed directly by Council; volunteer or part-time coordinator. |

## Implementation Roadmap

### Establishing the Economic and Social Impact Team

As part of the initial feasibility assessment, once approvals are in place, the Trust will conduct an affordability benchmark study, including three pro forma profit-and-loss business plans for different building sizes. These studies will form the basis of the other core body of

work the Trust will develop: an economic and social impact and insights team to support the Norwegian creative economy.

As part of this initial work, the Land Trust will:

- Map and maintain a GIS-enabled database of all cultural spaces and potentially vacant municipally owned buildings in Norway to identify deficiencies, opportunities, and the simplest, least-cost sites to develop. This map will be made available to the public and updated annually.
- Commission a baseline study of market rents for creative and production space in Oslo, Trondheim, and Bergen.
- Develop a business model with a set target benchmark rent (e.g., 30–40% of the market rate), calibrated to the creative sector's capabilities, as demonstrated by sector income data. The proposed rent will differ by the size of the space and its capabilities — for example, an empty artist workspace will carry one rate; a rehearsal space with accessible equipment will carry another. This will be developed in partnership with existing suppliers and providers to ensure the Trust does not unintentionally compete with them. The model will be influenced by a transparent cost-recovery approach used by Art Hubs in Toronto, where tenants see the true operating costs of their space, with any shortfall covered by cross-subsidy or a built-in grant.
- Create and initiate a Norwegian Cultural Spaces Survey to gather and review the affordability benchmark annually against market data and income surveys.
- Develop a social impact matrix that local partners can apply to ensure each asset is being used in the best possible way for the community it serves.

This is the required work to support our vision. In summary, this means we will:

- Establish a list of potential assets.
- Refine potential partners, including shortlisting board participants.
- Establish local delivery partners.
- Design three different profit and loss plans, based on building size.
- Establish an Economic and Social Impact Team, whose responsibility is to:
- Map and assess the current environment.
- Create a business model.

To complete this, we have designed the implementation roadmap below.

### Phase 1 — Foundation: March to November 2026

- Gather empirical evidence across Oslo, Trondheim, and Bergen (or across all of Norway). Engage with Øveriet, OLYP, Musikkbyen, and other operators to quantify waiting lists and unmet needs. And similar operators in other creative fields.
- Commission a social impact study of Øveriet to demonstrate the potential and need for the Land Trust. This will be presented at the Kulturarenakonferansen in September.

- Formalise the steering committee with an appropriate range of interests represented — creative practitioners, property, finance, legal, and municipal government.
- Identify and engage local stakeholders. Map and convene key stakeholders in each target city. Conduct consultations with the creative community to define priorities and build social licence.
- Present the vision for approval to secure funding and move to Phase 2.

### Phase 2 — Capitalisation and First Acquisition: November 2026 to August 2027

- **Establish the organization/network.**. Define mission, articles of association, and board composition. Appoint the initial Board of Trustees and leadership.
- **Commission a baseline study** of creative space supply, demand, and affordability across Norway. Define affordability metrics: benchmark market rents, agree on a target discount methodology, and define tenant eligibility criteria.
- **Search and research properties.** Identify candidate properties in each city; conduct functional and financial feasibility assessments; prioritise acquisition at below-market rate from municipal surplus.
- **Establish capital stack and operational budget.** Secure seed funding from public and philanthropic partners; engage impact investors; explore community share issues.
- **Acquire the first property.** Complete the transaction for the first site. Structure terms, payment schedule, and long-term lease or ownership arrangement (or alternative agreement with partners)
- **Appoint or develop an operating partner.** Select or build the operational capacity to manage the first property. Agree on policies, procedures, tenant selection, rent levels, and programming.

### Phase 3 — Launch 2027 and Beyond: from September 2027 onwards

Launch publicly in autumn 2027 — and ensure the nation and the world know that this is a world-first national model for cultural infrastructure. Open the first property, establish required governance boards and begin community engagement. Forecast the maintenance lifecycle and plan finance for further buildings. Document lessons learned and begin scoping the second and third acquisitions.

# PART 4: Risk Assessment

This is one-third of the vision, because we recognise the challenge of creating an organisation like this, and we want to state these challenges from the outset. We are confident, but we are not naive. We believe all of these risks can be mitigated and overcome, but in order to create a portfolio of assets that can be enshrined into Norway's public commons for the next 100 years, and to deliver the economic and social benefit (and jobs) we expect, it is best to state and expand on the barriers here so that they are incorporated into the business model as it develops.

What follows is our assessment of the structural, financial, regulatory, and practical barriers to establishing the Land Trust — and to acquiring and renovating buildings. The barriers described below are real and significant. They are also surmountable, and understanding them in detail is the first step toward designing a model that anticipates rather than reacts to the challenges ahead.

## The Difficulty of Estimating Renovation Costs

One of the most consistent challenges facing cultural operators in Norway when considering taking on a building — and one specifically named by practitioners in Oslo and elsewhere — is the fundamental difficulty of estimating what it will actually cost to bring a building up to a usable standard in a world of rising costs, inflation, climate change, and uncertainty.

Norway's building standards are among the most stringent in Europe. The current technical regulations (TEK17) set demanding requirements for energy performance, acoustic standards, fire safety, accessibility, and ventilation. For any building used for music rehearsal, recording, or cultural production, these requirements compound the problem: acoustic isolation alone can represent a disproportionately large share of total fit-out costs, and specialist contractors are scarce. Many of the buildings most likely to be available to the Trust — disused industrial structures, former municipal offices, church properties — were built to entirely different standards and require significant structural and systems upgrades simply to be occupied safely. The construction cost index for residential buildings rose by 4.9% in the first nine months of 2023 alone, and Norway's construction industry contracted by over 2% in 2023 and a further 3% in 2024.

For heritage or historically significant buildings, this challenge intensifies. Norway's Cultural Heritage Act and the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) impose additional restrictions that can require restoration to original condition rather than adaptation to contemporary needs, creating tensions. Hidden damage, hazardous materials, and subsurface conditions routinely cause project costs to exceed initial estimates by significant margins.

For a Cultural Land Trust, the consequences of underestimating renovation costs are particularly serious. Unlike a commercial developer that can adjust rents, exit the project, or absorb losses through other portfolio activity, the Trust is committed to long-term affordable

tenancies. Cost overruns at the rehabilitation stage directly threaten the long-term affordability model and can break the financial viability of an entire project. The Trust's mitigation strategy must include pre-acquisition technical surveys, a professional project manager with deep Norwegian construction expertise on the board or in the leadership team, contingency reserves of 15–20% of the rehabilitation budget, and, where possible, a phased fit-out model that delays non-critical works until income is established. Our preferred approach is to negotiate longer-term loans for the initial acquisitions to test the model, recognising that there will be a long-term relationship with the lender to help plan for such cost overruns.

We also recognise that an additional 25% VAT is added onto refitting costs of cultural venues. This is a regulation that we are advocating be amended to reduce the risk for cultural developers of investing in buildings, and it will be part of our initial advocacy platform as we grow.

## Access to Finance: The Gap Between Grant and Bank

*"We don't lack good cultural projects in Norway — we lack a financial structure between grants and banks."*

We heard this in our travels, and this observation captures the core financing challenge with precision. Norway's cultural sector is relatively well supported by public grants — Arts Council Norway alone managed approximately €150 million in state funds earmarked for arts and culture in 2020, but this funding is not designed to capitalise the acquisition and long-term ownership of real estate, and it rarely does.

Norwegian commercial banks are not experienced in lending to cultural organisations for the acquisition of real estate. Banks assess cultural sector entities as high-risk borrowers: collateral (other than the property itself) is often minimal, and the sector lacks the track record of commercial returns that lenders require for standard mortgage products. A Land Trust operating below-market rents by design makes the conventional lender's underwriting logic difficult to apply. Interest rates in Norway remain at 4.25%, held at that level again in June 2026, keeping the cost of acquisition finance high. For cultural organisations without a balance sheet, personal guarantees from founders and directors have historically been the mechanism of last resort — placing individuals at financial risk alongside their organisations. This is wholly unsustainable.

The EU's Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility (CCS GF) — which Norway, as an EEA member, is technically eligible to access — offers a partial response, providing guarantees of up to 70% of individual loan losses to financial intermediaries willing to lend to creative sector SMEs. The facility has generated over €1.3 billion in debt financing across eleven countries. However, take-up by Norwegian financial intermediaries has been limited, and the facility does not natively address the real estate acquisition needs of a foundation structure. What Norway lacks, and what the Trust must help to create, is what the sector has described as a "Husbanken for culture": a state-backed or state-guaranteed lending

mechanism specifically designed for cultural infrastructure investment. Our mission is to help bring this model into being, because it is how we believe the Trust can flourish — and with it, Norway as a whole.

Until such a mechanism exists, we will focus on our hybrid model — combining municipally contributed or gifted assets, grants, and patient capital from impact-aligned investors. A state guarantee on loans, modelled on the approach used for social housing in Norway, is the most important structural innovation the Trust can advocate for.

## A Lack of Land-Use Policy to Support Culture

We outlined this earlier, but we feel it needs further discussion. Norway's Planning and Building Act (*Plan- og bygningsloven*) provides the statutory framework for land use across the country, administered through a three-tier hierarchy of national, county, and municipal plans. Municipalities are required to maintain master plans (*kommuneplan*) and detailed zoning plans (*detaljregulering*) that legally define how each parcel of land may be used. The law permits the designation of land for cultural purposes (*kulturformål*), and municipalities can, in principle, zone land or buildings specifically to protect cultural use. In practice, however, this rarely happens.

There is no national requirement for municipalities to include the provision of cultural space in their planning frameworks, and no equivalent in Norway to the planning obligations or s106 mechanisms used in the United Kingdom to secure cultural infrastructure contributions from private developers. Norwegian municipalities are facing widespread short-term budgetary pressures, given the tightening share of local authority expenditure allocated to culture. As such, buildings that could serve creatives sit empty, fall into disrepair, or are sold to developers. The cases of Bergen Kjøtt and the proposed Gamle Munch site in Oslo are instructive: in both, community and cultural actors had to fight on an ad hoc basis, without a systemic planning framework that would have protected the sites in the first place.

Research into Norwegian planning practice highlights a further structural problem: the system faces significant challenges in synchronising legally binding land-use plans across three levels of government, and many spatial decisions are effectively pre-determined by sector-specific policies and constraints that crowd out discretionary designations for cultural use. The case of Mindemyren in Bergen — where a major regeneration area took more than fifteen years from initiation to first zoning approval, and emerged predominantly as residential rather than mixed-use — illustrates how the system's rigidity tends to favour dominant, commercially viable uses over more complex, lower-yield cultural designations. The Norwegian Land Policy analysis notes that municipalities have been reluctant to use available instruments for strategic land management, leaving the planning framework with few effective tools to resolve tenure inertia or protect uses in the public interest.

This gap also manifests in how cities track and account for cultural activity. Operators are registered under inconsistent categories, making it impossible to monitor when spaces are lost or to make the policy case for replacing them. Without reliable data on the cultural space

ecosystem — an issue we will address through the Economic and Social Impact Team — it is difficult to build the political case for protective planning measures. By delivering this important research first and using it to underpin the Trust, we can address these inefficiencies.

## A Weak Philanthropic Tradition

Norway does not have a strong philanthropic tradition. Specifically for cultural infrastructure, the challenge is compounded by the structure of Norwegian tax incentives. Tax deductions for corporate donations are limited, and there are relatively few incentives for private companies to contribute to cultural causes. This contrasts sharply with the US and UK models, where tax incentives actively encourage major gifts for cultural infrastructure, and with Denmark's Realdania, a philanthropic association that operates a substantial portfolio of built-environment projects in the public interest, funded in part by a membership model and investment returns that have no Norwegian equivalent. Norwegian cultural policy has not historically encouraged wealthy individuals to become donors to cultural organisations, and the idea of tax incentives specifically designed to grow a cultural real estate philanthropy market has not been seriously explored.

The most promising Norwegian philanthropic leaders for the Trust are the *Sparebankstiftelser*. Their "cathedral thinking" approach, as described by the Sparebank Foundation itself, is genuinely aligned with the Trust's 100-year mission.

## Competition for Property in a Rising Market

The Norwegian property market presents a formidable competitive environment for any organisation seeking to acquire buildings at non-speculative values. Average property prices in Oslo were approximately NOK 89,100 per square metre in early 2024. National prices grew by 6.4% in 2024 and a further 4.8% in 2025. In the commercial real estate market, prime Oslo office rents have reached approximately €570 per square metre per year. Against this backdrop, competition from residential and commercial developers for the types of buildings the Trust would seek — former industrial sites, underused civic buildings, mixed-use buildings in urban centres — is intense and well resourced.

Norwegian municipalities are themselves under pressure to realise value from their property portfolios. Short-term budget cycles and declining shares of local authority expenditure on culture create incentives for municipalities to sell surplus assets to the highest bidder, even when those assets have strong cultural potential. The sale of properties with cultural or community value — documented in press reports such as Arkitektur.no's 'Når byen selger seg selv' ('When the city sells itself') — is a pattern that the Trust exists precisely to interrupt. Speed of decision-making and capital readiness are, therefore, structural barriers that the Trust's governance and financial model must explicitly address.

## Regulatory and Planning Complexity in Acquiring a Building

Even once a suitable building has been identified and finance secured, the process of formally acquiring and converting a building for cultural use in Norway involves a series of regulatory steps that are individually manageable but collectively time-consuming, costly, and uncertain in outcome. Understanding these practical barriers is essential.

- **Change of use and rezoning.** If a building is zoned for commercial, industrial, or residential use, converting it to a cultural designation requires a formal rezoning process through the municipality. Under the Planning and Building Act, a property zoned for commercial use cannot be converted without a formal amendment to the zoning plan — a process that can take years and is not guaranteed to succeed. The municipality's master plan and detailed zoning plans must be formally amended, involving public consultation periods and potential objections from neighbouring landowners, commercial interests, and other stakeholders. The Bergen Kjøtt experience illustrates how politically and procedurally fraught this process can be, even when there is significant public support for a cultural use.
- **Heritage and conservation constraints.** Where a building is listed under the Cultural Heritage Act or falls within a conservation area, alterations require approval from both the municipality and Riksantikvaren. These approvals may require that changes be reversed, materials be sourced to the original specification, and façades or internal features be preserved, even when they impede the building's usability for cultural production. Acoustic isolation, ventilation systems, and fire safety upgrades — all essential for music and performance spaces — can each generate friction with heritage requirements, adding both cost and delay. In some cases, properties may need to be restored to their original state rather than adapted, fundamentally altering the business case for their use.
- **Municipal decision-making timelines.** The Trust's preferred acquisition pathway — municipal transfer or long-term lease of public surplus property — is inherently subject to municipal political cycles. We recognise that a committed municipal partner in 2027 may be a resistant one in 2028, and long-term lease terms of 99 years lock in conditions once agreed. But the challenge lies in securing agreement in the first place. Building cross-party political support and ensuring that cultural infrastructure is embedded in the municipality's long-term property strategy, not dependent on the priorities of a single administration, is essential.

## The Absence of a Shared Creative Economy Data Model

A systemic barrier that underpins many of the others is the absence of a coherent national data framework for the creative economy. This is why we believe the Trust can thrive only if it also includes an Economic and Social Impact Team that works for the entire country. Norway's Statistics Agency (SSB) records employment in cultural and creative industries, but the data is fragmented. As we have outlined, in 2023, 93,600 people were employed in cultural and creative industries; by 2024, this had fallen to 92,800, a decline whose causes are poorly understood because the supporting infrastructure data- spaces lost, venues

closed, operators displaced- simply are not captured anywhere. Some venues are registered under food service, others under cultural production, and some under entirely different classifications. There is no systematic registry of cultural infrastructure that would allow policymakers to track the sector's health, respond to losses, or make evidence-based arguments for protection.

This data gap is a barrier to both making the case for the Trust and running it effectively. Without baseline mapping of creative space supply, demand, and affordability, and without a standardised methodology for measuring impact, the Trust cannot demonstrate to funders, municipalities, or the public that it is delivering value.

Commissioning this baseline, as proposed in Phase 1 of the implementation roadmap, is not optional overhead; it is a foundational investment that makes everything else credible.

## Summary: Barriers and Proposed Responses

The barriers described above are significant but not insurmountable. Many reflect structural features of Norwegian society — its planning system, its philanthropic culture, its construction market — that cannot be changed quickly. Our vision of the Trust is an organisation that operates within those constraints while simultaneously advocating for the reforms that would make the environment more enabling over time. The table below summarises the core barriers and the Trust's proposed responses.

| Barrier | Why it matters | Proposed response |
|---|---|---|
| Renovation cost uncertainty | Overruns destroy the affordable rent model. | Pre-acquisition surveys; 15–20% contingency; phased fit-out. |
| No "Husbanken for culture" | Banks won't lend to below-market cultural models. | State guarantee model; municipal asset contributions; impact capital; advocate for a Husbanken equivalent. |
| No cultural land-use protection | Cultural spaces are lost to development without recourse. | Advocate for national planning guidance; engage with municipal masterplan processes; use the Trust as a delivery mechanism. |
| Weak philanthropic tradition | Limited private capital for cultural infrastructure. | Frame the Trust as an investment, not a charity; engage Sparebankstiftelser; build a community share model. |
| Competitive property market | The Trust cannot match commercial bids or timelines. | Pre-approved capital facility; municipal transfer as the primary pathway; maintain a long pipeline of |
| Regulatory and planning complexity | Rezoning, heritage, and building code processes slow acquisition. | Legal and planning expertise on the board from day one; prefer already-zoned cultural properties where possible. |
| No creative economy data model | Cannot demonstrate impact or identify opportunities without baseline data. | Commission baseline study in Phase 1; adopt international measurement frameworks. |

# PART 5: Where Do We Go From Here?

We intend to launch this world-first national model for cultural infrastructure in 2027. We are seeking partners to make this real.

**To the municipalities reading this:** the Trust is designed to enable you, not to replace you. Where you want to retain ownership of cultural property, we can co-invest. Where you want to transfer, we will steward in perpetuity. The municipal voice stays at the table on every Trust property in your jurisdiction. Local decisions remain local decisions. Always.

**To foundations and impact investors:** this is a way to consolidate existing public and philanthropic spending on culture into long-term, asset-backed infrastructure. Same money, different structure and a better result, for you and for the communities you're investing in.

**To artists and cultural organisations:** the Trust holds property; it does not programme. Editorial independence is built into the structure. Local and Regional Advisory Councils, with artist representation, decide what happens inside each building. We are here to enable you. That's it.

This vision document is an invitation to action. It is designed to be shared with potential partners, funders, municipal leaders, and the creative community itself. We ask readers to consider:

- Do you share this vision for Norway's creative future?
- Can you contribute property, capital, expertise, or political support to making it real?
- Will you join the steering committee, the advisory network, or the first community share campaign?
- Can you help us identify the right buildings, partners, and moment to act?

We welcome your feedback and look forward to engaging with you.

**Contact:** post@kulturrom.no