

# BAK, basis voor actuele kunst

## Requested Subsidy Amount 2025–2028

€ 700.000,— per year

## Amount Culture Memorandum 2021–2024

€ 620.268,— per year

## Summary of the Application

BAK, basis voor actuele kunst (BAK) combines public programming with research, production, talent development, knowledge sharing, and presentations. BAK's practice encompasses the area where the fields of art, knowledge production, and social action overlap. Their transdisciplinary projects are developed locally and have a global relevance. BAK is the only art institute in the Netherlands that combines the functions of a presentation institution with those of a post-academic institution. It offers both a conceptual and a physical space to the (artistic) practice of artists, scientists, (local) partners, and their audiences. Substantive principles are expressed in themes and projects as well as in business operations. BAK organizes exhibitions (in its own building and elsewhere, in collaboration with partners at home and abroad), conversations, lectures, conferences, training, research, education, and publications. In the coming years, BAK's policy focuses on collectivity and a sense of community, under the motto *How Can We Be More?*

## Advice

### Artistic Quality

The committee speaks of a clear application in which BAK presents a rich artistic program. It emphasizes that BAK is the only institution in the Netherlands that connects the functions of a post-academy with those of a presentation institution; functions that feed and strengthen each other. The committee calls this approach interesting, consistent, and artistically solid. It does note that, due to their theoretical nature, the themes of the programs appear to be mainly aimed at a specific target group. However, the committee appreciates the way in which BAK uses focus groups to gain depth. The committee also observes that BAK consciously invests in translating the complex content of the program to a broader audience. It notes that for those that find their way to the institution and take their time, there is a lot to be gained. Although the practice of BAK is not accessible to everyone due to its often theoretical approach, the committee believes that its results trickle down into the broader cultural field—in Utrecht, nationally, as well as internationally. Moreover, BAK not only addresses social themes in the artistic program, but also puts them into practice: for example by paying attention to working conditions (BAK was one of the initiators of the Fair Practice Code) and in developing a civic practice (an intensive relationship with makers and visitors). With regard to diversity and inclusion, the committee notes that, with the program *How Can We Be More?*, the organization will continue to investigate how a more inclusive, comprehensive “we” can be achieved in the coming years.

**30 points**

### Significance to the City

The committee notes that BAK works intensively on relations with various partners in the city. It also appreciates the way in which BAK connects an interesting international network with a solid local network. There is a strong substantive and academic network with Utrecht University and the HKU University of the Arts, Utrecht. According to the committee, BAK continues to investigate what its significance as an art institution can be for the cultural climate in the city. It points out that BAK does not shy away from major public activities, as shown by its involvement in the Sint Maarten Parade. The BAK Young Fellows program for young people aged 15 to 19 is also special according to the committee. It is positive that the institution is opting to expand the education program to include mbo (secondary vocational education) in the coming period, but would have liked to read more about its objectives. Although the committee understands the difficult task of communicating the program to a broader audience, the application lacks concrete goals to increase the audience impact. It appreciates that BAK operates with a strong social consciousness, but wonders whether the organization is sufficiently aware of the needs of the people of Utrecht and what is going on in the city.

**20 points**

## Achievability

The committee appreciates the choice for a new organizational model, which it believes fits with BAK's mission, vision, and working methods. Principles of solidarity and honesty guide BAK's commission and employment practices. However, the committee believes that the financial dependence on the BIS and the municipality of Utrecht is too great. The contribution from private funds is relatively low. According to the committee, this makes the organization vulnerable. Although BAK expects to double its own revenues, these still remain limited. The committee is positive about the awareness of the different codes that is evident from the application. In collaboration with De Zaak NU, BAK was one of the founders of the Fair Practice Code and the salary grade for presentation institutions. The committee notes that it considers it positive that BAK wants to increase volunteer compensation, but wonders whether working with volunteers as a principle fits the social profile of the organization. In addition, attention to diversity and inclusion seems to be mainly focused on programs and partners, and less on public outreach and personnel. But above all, the committee struggles with the low visitor numbers compared to the high subsidy amount requested. BAK also expects a significant decline in visitor figures for 2025 compared to 2023, a development that the committee finds insufficiently substantiated. The committee had wished to see an ambition to maintain visitor numbers or only reduce them slightly. The application also does not make it sufficiently clear how many residents of Utrecht actually come into contact with the program.

**10 points**

## Contribution to the Cultural Ecosystem

Although the committee assesses BAK's significance to the city positively, it considers the added value in relation to the cultural ecosystem as a whole to be modest. It appreciates the position that BAK occupies nationally and internationally within the visual arts as the only art institution in the Netherlands that combines the functions of a presentation institution and post-academic institution. But the committee believes that BAK, as an established institution in the city, has a greater and broader responsibility with regard to public outreach and exchange with other players in the cultural field. The application lacks a substantive elaboration of this demand-oriented, reaching out and connecting role. It is not convinced that BAK is able to sufficiently meet the needs and interests of the Utrecht public and current developments in the city. Also given the requested amount, the committee had expected a stronger connection to the city.

Considering the totality of applications in relation to each other and the four pillars as further described in the Culture Memorandum—namely a pluriform offering, an inclusive cultural sector, stimulation of creative capacity, and room for development—BAK's expected contribution to the cultural ecosystem is not considered of such a nature and extent that there is reason for a higher score than the number of points stated below.

**20 points**

Total score: **80 points**

Recommended subsidy amount: -