Invest in UK
University R&D
Campaign

LOCAL POWER, GLOBAL REACH

Internationalisation Toolkit

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MIDLANDS INNOVATION

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Introduction and Context

“There’s no secret to what we do in London, it’s just we’ve had longer to learn from our mistakes and figure out what works”

Laura Citron, CEO of London & Partners, Speaking at the launch of the Commission on Devolution and Diplomacy, June 2026

Places already have valuable assets — in research, culture, diaspora networks and industry — that could attract a much wider range of global partners. What most places lack is a clear, structured way to use those assets with purpose. This toolkit is designed to address that.

Through its research, the Commission on Devolution and Diplomacy identified that after the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies in 2010, the impacts of Austerity, Brexit and the COVID-19 Pandemic, sub-national internationalisation in most English regions is now fragmented and uneven, with significant variations in local capacity.

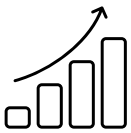
Though some strategic authorities (most notably Greater Manchester, London and Scotland) have well-developed international strategies, much of this activity is not sufficiently resourced and suffers from being reactive to shifting sands in Whitehall and Westminster, de-linking it from clearly aligned, long-term and tangible outcomes for the local economy.

The same issues also apply to the degree of interconnection on internationalisation between many English Regions, their universities local authorities, industry, cultural organisation and diaspora. As a result, opportunities are routinely missed because of a diffusion of impact, or a lack of follow-through capacity. The consequences of this over the long-term mean that investment is not secured, export potential is unrealised, research partnerships fail to materialise, cultural relationships lose momentum before they generate value and international talent chooses alternative destinations.

Moreover, the gap between those places who have managed to retain stable, relatively well-resourced internationalisation operations and those without grows ever greater. This then leads to an inevitable ‘picking of winners’ by busy teams at UK Diplomatic Posts who face significant resource constraints/ reductions whilst managing an increasingly geopolitical turbulent climate.

The four reasons places pursue sub-national internationalisation and diplomacy

Regions and cities tend to pursue international engagement for four primary reasons, each with their own logic, metrics and degrees of importance to a place. These are:



Attracting investment:
Corporate Foreign Direct Investment (international companies moving to an areas), or capital investment (development finance, venture investment in a region's companies or funding vehicles). Occasionally international philanthropic/ impact capital.



Promoting exports and supporting trade:
Helping locally-based businesses (big and small) access international markets, lobby governments, build export relationships and participate in global supply chains.



Supporting the international visitor economy:
Promoting and raising the profile and brand of a place in order to attract international tourists, secure major events and attract global talent to live, work and stay in places.



Build international relations:
Foster targeted international relationships and partnerships with other nations/ regions. This 'civic soft-power' includes cultural, innovation and policy exchanges that help develop long-term relationship infrastructure and diplomatic ties that support the three tangible economic outcomes listed above.

The most internationally engaged places pursue these strands with purpose, using a targeted and concerted strategy that maximises the patch. The Commission has been fortunate to spend time with many.

Whitehall, internationalisation and place

It is worth noting that the very construction of Whitehall's various internationalisation departments provides an engagement challenge for places. For example, Mayors will likely have an overarching helicopter-view/ internationalisation agenda that inevitably spans all of the domains listed above. Coordinating these across a single international mission can be complex.

Whitehall, internationalisation and place

Department (or Institution)	Internationalisation function	Relationship with place
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)	Hosts the UK's diplomatic presence globally, as well as functions such as the Trade Envoy Programme, which is designed to support bilateral engagement between the UK and the countries represented on the programme.	Each Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) has a dedicated FCDO account manager. A Devolution Unit exists. Devolution is a listed responsibility for the Minister of State, Stephen Doughty MP.
Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST) — including UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) and Innovate UK	Supports UK trade and exports, as well as strategies including the Industrial Strategy and UK Trade Strategy. DSIT — which recently merged with DBT — has a large internationalisation function, managing large multi- and bi-lateral funding for research, innovation and technology co-operation. They co-fund (with the FCDO) the UK Science and Technology Network, which has over 100 staff embedded across UK diplomatic missions. UKRI's international teams manage funding for global research, international R&D policy and co-ordinate international collaboration across the other Research Councils. They have staff embedded in a small number of key international posts. Innovate UK has a dedicated international team, with dedicated international funding and programmes such as the Global Business Innovation Programme, introducing high-innovation companies to export markets. They also host an inward investment brokerage team.	DBIST has a Director for Local and International Growth and national teams are responsible for regional engagement. There used to be pan-regional teams, such as the Midlands Engine or Northern Powerhouse, including dedicated international posts, but these arrangements no longer exist. Currently, there's no public regional account management structure for England. The devolved administrations, by comparison, have dedicated teams in DBT supporting them. Before joining DBT, DSIT didn't have a formal dedicated regional team. UKRI has a Place Director, with some Research Councils allocating a 'key account manager' to each MSA. Innovate UK has an Executive Director for Global and Place who oversees both the international team and an extensive network of local innovation economic advisers (via franchise arrangements).
Office for Investment (OfI) — part of the Department for Business and Trade and the Prime Minister's Office	Supports secure high-value, strategic foreign investment to support major UK economic priorities.	The OfI has a small 'place' team with dedicated staff responsible for multiple English regions. They have pilot partnerships with some MSAs.
Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, including No.10 North and the GREAT Campaign	Responsible for central government co-ordination, national security and managing relations with the European Union and international forums like the G7 and G20. It also oversees the GREAT Campaign and also shares responsibility for devolution and economic development policy with HM Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.	The GREAT Campaign features national and regional strengths in global campaigns. The Cabinet Office also houses the Union and Constitution Group, which leads intergovernmental relations between the UK government and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The Cabinet Office has historically had little interaction with England's MSAs, though through No.10 North, it is now engaging them on a regular basis. No.10 North operates in Manchester and is currently building capacity.

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) — including the British Tourist Authority, VisitBritain and VisitEngland.	DCMS supports the UK to host major global events, as well as engage with them. They have one member of staff that is embedded outside of the UK (in Los Angeles). DCMS host the British Tourist Authority which oversees Visit Britain and VisitEngland and is responsible for the UK's visitor economy. VisitBritain have several staff embedded outside of the UK.	Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEPs) manage the regional visitor economy and engage with VisitEngland. Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs) have also been trialled. The devolved administrations have separate bodies — VisitScotland, VisitWales, Tourism Northern Ireland —that collaborate with Visit Britain. DCMS is working with mayors on a new Stadium Regeneration Accelerator.
Ministry of Defence (MoD)	The MoD is responsible for the UK's defence and security — with some overlap on exports and investments. It has a significant international presence in almost all UK diplomatic postings.	MoD supports Regional Defence and Security Clusters (RDSCs), which are regional networks that link industry, academia and the MoD. The RDSCs aim to boost local supply chain resilience and accelerate the adoption of innovative technologies.
British Council	The British Council is responsible for UK arts and culture soft power including the provision of international language training and promotion of UK education and creative industries. Its staff operate in over 100 markets, however the British Council is under significant financial pressure and its functions are being scaled back, with a consequential impact on capacity.	The British Council has dedicated teams for the devolved administrations, but no direct links to England's MSAs following the closure of its Manchester headquarters.
Arts Council England (ACE)	ACE supports international arts and cultural collaboration through partnerships, exchange programmes and funding for international engagement, such as international touring.	Area Directors covering the South East, South West, North, Midlands and London engage with MSAs and local authorities.

Beyond the UK Government's formal structures, the British Chambers of Commerce have well-established, business-facing teams in many markets who work closely with diplomatic posts. They also have extensive regional teams — which is often a helpful starting point for places seeking to engage. The devolved nations also have a range of dedicated international functions and economic growth bodies, such as Scottish Development International, as well as staff embedded in UK Diplomatic Posts. In England, London & Partners has international representatives in key markets, and some other MSAs have fractional roles hosted overseas.

Sub-national diplomacy: a taxonomy for soft-power audits

The Commission on Devolution Diplomacy Report recommended that regional leaders should consider co-convening 'Place-based Soft-Power Audits' in partnership with their local universities to try and map what is often a fragmented, incomplete picture of current or historical international connections.

To support these efforts, this Toolkit suggests places use Favier Ltd's taxonomy of devolution diplomacy, which breaks down this soft-power audit into four separate 'Diplomatic Asset Classes'. These encompass traditional economic metrics such as trade, investment and visitor economy flows alongside other sources such as university international alumni communities and overseas campuses or twinning and heritage connections.

01 Industrial Diplomacy	02 Knowledge Diplomacy	03 Civic Diplomacy	04 Cultural Diplomacy
Capital, trade and the corporate relationships that bring investment in and take exports out.	Universities, research and innovation as routes to global partners, talent and capital	Formal and historic place-to-place relationships held by councils and civic institutions.	People, culture and sport that carry a place's reputation abroad.
1.1 Inward investment flows	2.1 University international student flows	3.1 Civic twinning relationships, dormant or active	4.1 International visitor economy flows
1.2 Trade and export flows	2.2 Overseas campuses and TNE flows*	3.2 Historical or heritage connections	4.2 International diasporic connections
1.3 Strategic inward investment nodes, inbound and outbound	2.3 Alumni concentrations*	3.3 International place partners and networks	4.3 Sporting diplomacy connections
	2.4 International research partnerships*		4.4 Music, arts and film connections
	2.5 International industry partnerships*		
	2.6 Inward investment in R&D and high-innovation companies		

* Significant connections only

From this starting point of discovering and evaluating 'what you already have', places should then seek to identify the international opportunities that are most likely to align to their relevant strengths and future timescales. For example, places should consider the potential impact of macro-diplomatic opportunities such as Free Trade Agreements, bilateral investment partnerships or long-standing international economic or security collaboration, alongside other contextual factors such as significant currency fluctuations, ease of doing business (language, rule of law, monetary policy). Below these macro considerations, they should look to focus internationalisation activity on small number of clearly articulated sectors that are a demonstrable strength for their local economies – not least because this will enable them to more readily access the support and advice of DBIST sector teams. For larger markets, regions should look to target specific Regions/ States within these countries where there are either pre-existing connections or significant potential complementarity.

Finally, for any a sub-national international place partnership to be sustainable – it needs to have multiple points of connection across the above four dimensions of devolution diplomacy. It should not rely on the travel schedule of the Mayor, recognising the pressures on leadership time and the importance of long-term, consistent engagement and relationship building in any international partnership development. Places seeking to weigh-up international markets for engagement and partnership should base this on a strong, evidence-base. However, there is inevitably going to need a degree of subjectivism in any decision – and so places should also establish strong governance arrangements to commission and consider the results of the soft-power audits above.



Map of UK twinning links across England, Scotland and Wales, from the interactive 'Devolution Diplomacy Dashboard'

Commission on Devolution and Diplomacy: Internationalisation Toolkit

This toolkit has been informed by the Commission's engagement with regions, cities and devolved nations in the UK and globally. It is designed to provide a resource for those places seeking to develop, refresh or assess their internationalisation strategies. It aims to provide a route map for places seeking to identify the connections, data and partnerships that might inform this work — as well as some helpful case studies and best-practice drawn from the Commission's research.

The toolkit has been designed to help places make explicit choices, not pursue everything at once. It should be seen as a practical resource of interest to officials in strategic and local authorities, growth companies, universities and their partners — the people with day-to-day responsibility for turning international ambition into outcomes. It is structured around a 'maturity model' drawn from what the Commission identified about how effective sub-national diplomacy operates. The stages are intended to help places identify current capability, understand where the gaps are, and set a clear direction for what comes next.

Systems and their barriers

Sub-national diplomacy is best pursued as a collective endeavour. No single institution can deliver it alone, with the most common failure not a shortage of ambition but a shortage of co-ordination.
Five anchor institutions are central to this work.

Strategic authorities

Provide the scale and co-ordinating function that makes a city-region attractive to international partners. Directly elected mayors bring a democratic mandate and public visibility that is recognised internationally — opening doors and convening conversations that officers and institutions cannot reach alone.

Universities

Bring global reach through international campuses, research partnerships, alumni networks and soft power that other public institutions cannot replicate.

Local authorities

Contribute long-standing civic relationships, city brand identities that are often more legible internationally than strategic authorities, and deep roots in community and business networks that take decades to build.

Cultural, sporting and heritage assets

Shape international perception and generate the access that formal diplomacy cannot buy.

Internationally-engaged industry

Companies with an international presence, including major exporters, global brands and businesses owned by international parent companies.

How these institutions work together is a critical success factor of effective sub-national diplomacy.

Barriers this toolkit addresses

Places across England are already active internationally. But that activity remains fragmented, uneven and often underpowered. The Commission has identified a series of structural barriers that this toolkit is designed to help places work around, and which the Commission's national recommendations address directly:

Weak co-ordination:
Responsibility is fragmented across institutions without shared priorities or a national entry point.

Limited capacity and capability:
Activity is treated as discretionary because it is not embedded in core mandates.

Poor data and measurement:
No reliable intelligence base and no consistent outcomes framework.

Risk and governance deficits:
Geopolitical, commercial and security risks navigated without adequate guidance or national support.

The barriers are not mutually exclusive and rarely appear alone.

Use the self-diagnostic as your priority reading to understand which stage your institution is operating within — and use the checklists at the end of each stage to identify the specific actions that will make the most difference.

Start here: Self-diagnostic

Use this table to identify which structural barriers are limiting your ability to engage internationally. This will help you prioritise which stages to focus on first — and what to ask for from partners and the UK Government.[1]

QUESTION	1	2	3	GO TO
Can you articulate, with evidence grounded in comparative strengths, what your place offers that a global partner cannot find elsewhere?	☐	☐	☐	STAGE 01
Is there an institution or vehicle with the mandate, governance and cross-partner buy-in to lead international engagement on behalf of the whole place — and do the incentives of partner organisations align with collective priorities?	☐	☐	☐	STAGE 02
Does your place have a co-owned, published International Strategy with specific plans across all strands of international activity — tested for distinctiveness and reviewed in the last two years?	☐	☐	☐	STAGE 03
Is international engagement sustained between set piece events, with assets activated deliberately, national platforms used to multiply engagement, and mayoral time deployed where it opens doors others cannot?	☐	☐	☐	STAGE 04
Can a warm partner — whether investor, researcher, cultural institution, trading business or visitor economy operator — move from first contact to a clear next step through a single, responsive process, and do existing partners receive the same quality of attention as prospective ones?	☐	☐	☐	STAGE 05

Using this with your partners

The self-assessment is most valuable when completed separately by partners — then compared. Divergence in scores between institutions reveals where shared understanding requires further collaboration.

1 1 = early stages / not yet in place · 2 = under development · 3 = established and functioning

Your journey at a glance

Sub-national diplomacy is not sequential. Most places are engaged in several stages simultaneously and readiness varies within and between institutions. Use this table as a guide — the stages are cumulative, not strictly linear.

PHASE 1 — DEVELOPMENT	
01 Assess	Undertake your own Soft Power Audit, mapping assets across the whole place — institutional, economic, cultural, knowledge and diplomatic. Analyse your position within national and global value chains to identify where your sub-regional strengths are genuinely distinctive, not just locally significant.
02 Convene	Build the structures and relationships needed to act collectively. Agree ownership, roles and priorities across institutions. Establish the right vehicle for your current stage — from informal working group to formal Growth Company — and align the incentives of partners whose primary mandates lie elsewhere.
03 Decide	Make strategic choices. Codify your priorities in a co-owned International Strategy with specific plans for investment attraction, trade and export, R&D collaboration, cultural partnerships, talent and priority networks. Apply the Tipp-Ex test. Retire zombie partnerships. Build in a measurement framework from the outset.
PHASE 2 — DELIVERY	
04 Activate	Put the strategy into sustained, targeted action. The elected mayor leads high-value engagement, opens doors and signals commitment. The professional team builds and maintains the relationships that determine which doors are worth opening. National platforms — trade envoys, the GREAT Campaign, sector bodies — are used as impact multipliers.
05 Curate	Create the conditions for warm relationships to become lasting commitments across each strand of international activity. Manage the connections between strands deliberately. Ensure existing partners receive the same quality of attention as prospective ones.

A note on maturity

Strategic authorities are at very different stages. The checklist in each stage is cumulative — use it to identify your gaps, not to measure compliance. The most important insight often comes from completing the self-assessment separately from your local partners, then comparing scores.

PHASE ONE

DEVELOPMENT

Understand what you have. Build the structures to act on it. Make the choices that focus your effort.

Activities in the Development phase produce the foundation every effective international strategy requires:

- A clear, evidence-based account of what your place offers [Assess — the WHAT]
- The governance and relationships needed to act collectively [Convene — the WHO] and
- The strategic choices that translate assets and ambition into a focused international programme of activity [Decide — the WHERE and HOW].

Places that have completed all three development phase activities and published a co-owned International Strategy are ready to move into the delivery phase. The strategy is the public signal to global partners that you are ready to engage, and the internal commitment that gives delivery activities their mandate.

Development is not a one-time exercise.

As your place evolves, as markets shift and as the global environment changes, the analytical and governance foundations will need revisiting. The maturity model underpinning each activity helps you assess where you are — and what moving forward requires.

PHASE ONE

Step 1: Assess

You cannot compete globally without a coherent, internally aligned account of what you are offering.

The goal of this first stage is a rigorous, evidence-based answer to the question every global partner will ask: what does your place offer that we cannot find elsewhere? To do this you will need to map your diplomatic assets across the whole place — institutional, economic, cultural, knowledge and diasporic, and analyse your position within national and global value chains to identify where your sub-regional strengths are genuinely distinctive within national and global value chains. This activity produces the evidence base on which all subsequent decisions rest.

Key outputs: Diplomatic assets diagnostic completed; innovation value chain position mapped; whole-place proposition drafted.

Start with what you have

Most places already hold the raw material for this activity. Local Growth Plans name sector priorities. Universities track research partnerships. Growth companies hold investor pipeline data. Cultural institutions know their international touring and exchange programmes. The task is not to generate new information from scratch but to bring it together, test it, and translate it into a proposition specific enough to compete.

Start with your Growth Plan. It establishes the economic ambitions and sector priorities your place has already committed to. This activity refines those ambitions into a specific international offer — grounded in sub-regional capabilities that sit within national value chains and address genuine gaps in global markets.

The **Soft Power Audit** provides a structured framework for a whole-place audit. Use it across all anchor institutions and allied organisations. This analysis of existing assets, priorities, relationships and ambitions is the baseline for developing a shared international strategy. Since such assets are likely to be distributed throughout the region, an extensive mapping exercise maximises the likelihood that the fruits of diplomatic efforts are inclusive of communities outside of the urban core.

PLACE-BASED DIPLOMACY ASSETS — DIAGNOSTIC

Institutional
Capacity and capability within institutions, including public investment and the number of staff working in international engagement. Existence and maturity of structures within and between institutions that facilitate dialogue and shared activity.

Economic
Major employers, export sectors, Chambers of Commerce, business membership organisations and delivery vehicles, including growth companies, mayoral development corporations, freeports, AI growth zones and industrial strategy zones.

Cultural
Sporting institutions, including football, rugby, cricket, horseracing and tennis. Cultural institutions, including museums, film and heritage. Large-scale venues which regularly host musical, sporting and competitive events. The vibrance of the visitor economy.

Knowledge
Universities (including international campuses, international students, alumni network), research exchange programmes, innovation and R&D capabilities (including private sector).

Diplomatic
Existing international relationships, both formal and informal, including MoUs with municipalities or cities, commercial and cultural relationships built through diaspora networks, physical presence, such as the existence of embassies as well as the presence of international investment networks, such as through offices of Agent-Generals.

THE TIPP-EX TEST

A strong place proposition must be genuinely distinctive. The test is simple: cover your place name on the strategy document and ask whether and outsider could identify the region from the document. If the answer is no, the proposition is not yet differentiated enough to compete internationally. A strong proposition names the specific sub-sectors where the place leads, the national value chain it contributes to, and the global partners who need or complement that specific capability.

Self-assessment: Assess

	EMERGING	ESTABLISHED	LEADING
Asset mapping	An internal audit of the strategic authority's own international relationships and economic assets is complete and shared with key partners	A whole-place audit spans all anchor institutions — universities, cultural bodies, local authorities — and is held in common across the system	The whole-place audit is updated on a regular cycle, institutionally owned, and informs live decisions about resource allocation and partnership targeting
Opportunity framing	Broad target markets are identified, aligned to local priorities	Priority markets are selected using comparative analysis — testing the place's strengths against competitor or peer locations and global demand signals	The place understands its position within multi-region national propositions and adapts its framing by strand and market; the audit is stress-tested against geopolitical shifts
Proposition	The place articulates its headline sector strengths and existing international relationships clearly	The proposition names specific sub-sector capabilities, is differentiated from competitor places, and passes the Tipp-Ex test	The proposition is positioned within national value chains and global market context, co-owned across institutions, and used actively in international engagement

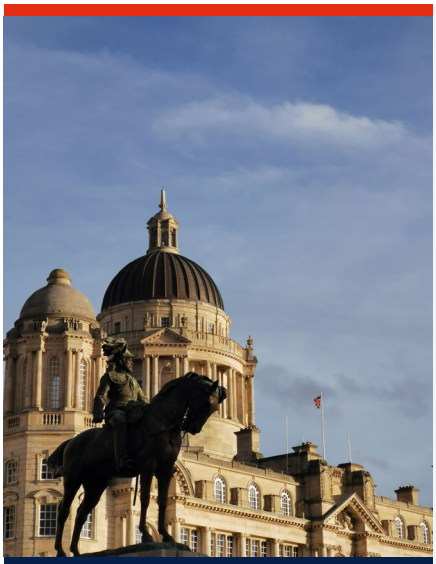
ADVANCED PRACTICE: CO-DESIGNING MULTI-REGION PROPOSITIONS

A Leading place asks not just what its international offer is in isolation, but where its regional strengths are most powerful in combination with those of complementary peers.

This requires knowing your position in national value chains well enough to identify which other nodes in those chains strengthen a joint proposition. A place whose infectious disease and vaccine manufacturing capability is presented alongside a complementary city-region's translational research infrastructure and another's biotech commercialisation ecosystem offers the global investor something no single place in the cluster can match.

Established places should understand where their capabilities and priorities intersect with those of other UK regions. Leading places are able to co-design joint market propositions with shared narrative, market intelligence, and co-ordinated engagement for at least one sector where national complementarity adds genuine value for global partners.

Case studies



CASE STUDY

Liverpool City Region, UK

From cultural soft power to specialist proposition

Liverpool City Region has a strong global brand — football, music, cultural heritage — but limited recognition of its specialist economic strengths. When the strategic authority set about building a serious inward investment strategy, the first task was detailed sub-sector mapping: examining not just which sectors were present but what the business ecosystem actually looked like within each one, where assets were being under-exploited commercially, and where genuine competitive advantage existed.

That process revealed that broad labels like 'life sciences' were analytically misleading, masking the specific niches (infectious diseases, vaccine development and manufacturing) where Liverpool had genuine world-class capability. It also revealed where the proposition intersected with other UK city-regions: Manchester occupies complementary positions in the same value chains, leading to active co-operation rather than competition. In 2026, Liverpool presented jointly with Manchester, Oxford and Cambridge at BIO International — the world's largest life sciences conference — with a nationally integrated proposition that none of them could make alone.



CASE STUDY

Barcelona, Spain

Diaspora science as intelligence infrastructure

Barcelona's diaspora science initiative links researchers from the city working abroad with local anchor institutions — using the relationship as both an intelligence source and an investment pathway. This is one of the most sophisticated models of using diasporic networks as active intelligence infrastructure. The programme generates leads for spinout co-investment, research partnerships and talent return.

Key actions

- [ ] Design and complete a Soft Power Audit across all anchor institutions and reconcile findings in a joint session.
- [ ] Apply the Tipp-Ex test to your current international proposition(s) — identify what needs to be sharpened.
- [ ] Conduct value chain analysis for your priority sectors — map sub-regional position within national clusters and global supply chains.
- [ ] Identify complementary city-regions for at least one priority sector and explore a joint market proposition.
- [ ] Establish a regular update cycle for the whole-place asset audit, linked to e.g. a review of the Local Growth Plan.

PHASE ONE

Step 2: Convene

Build the structures, relationships and shared ownership needed to act collectively.

Sub-national diplomacy falters less from a shortage of assets or ambition but from misaligned priorities and fragmented capability. This stage is about creating the institutional conditions for sustained, co-ordinated international engagement which generates whole-place impact. To do this you will need to agree ownership, roles and priorities across institutions, establish the right governance vehicle for your place, and align the incentives of partners.

Key outputs: Agreed governance model; clear ownership and accountability; shared priorities

From informal to formalised: the governance journey

Effective international engagement requires institutional infrastructure adequate to its ambition. At a minimum this must enable information sharing and co-design among regional partners across all aspects of international activity.

Mature areas with high ambitions for diplomatic activity will require more robust, multi-partner governance that enables information and resources to flow across the ecosystem and supports long-term decision-making. Ultimately, the quality of personal relationships will determine the success of any governance structure.

The model on the next page reflects the institutional conditions necessary for sustained, co-ordinated international engagement, moving beyond informal co-ordination to robust, multi-partner structures.

MODEL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK			
FORUM	**KEY STAKEHOLDERS**	**PRIMARY FUNCTION**	**OPERATIONAL RHYTHM**
Strategic Board	Senior leaders from business, universities, cultural institutions and other key regional assets. Elected mayor, strategic authority CEO, key local authority representatives.	Provide direction and challenge. Enable long-term decision-making, manage risk, and ensure political alignment beyond electoral cycles.	Bi-annual, formal dialogue.
Sector-specific theme boards (e.g. clusters, visitor economy, exports)	Private sector leaders, technical experts including university research leads, relevant local and strategic authority leads, relevant anchor institution reps.	Steward thematic priorities. Generate the deep market intelligence required for targeted propositions. Lead on proposition building. Feed proposals and updates to the Strategic Board.	Quarterly, formal meetings with agile 'task and finish' groups and secretariat-led activity between meetings.
Operational leaders	Strategic authority domain leads, Growth Company Relationship Managers, Pro Vice-Chancellors for International, Cultural Directors.	Oversee operational delivery and co-ordination across all international activities. Maintain access to senior leadership for time-sensitive opportunities.	Monthly formal meetings for structured sharing of intelligence and plans across all partners. Regular and responsive informal dialogue across the 'virtual team'.

Aligning partner incentives

The hardest governance problem is not structure but incentives. Universities typically measure the success of international initiatives in terms of research income, student numbers and REF performance. Cultural institutions value footfall and programme reach. Local authorities assess international efforts in terms of place-based investments secured and employment growth. These outcomes can be complementary but are not always naturally aligned. Formal mechanisms like civic university agreements, international relations boards and shared delivery plans help translate diplomatic activity into benefits each partner institution recognises in its own terms.

The Growth Company model

Growth companies bring investment, trade and export support, tourism and cultural promotion, talent recruitment and research partnerships together under a single institutional roof. Its private sector governance insulates long-term relationship-building from short-term political pressures. Its cross-institutional ownership (shareholders can include the strategic authority and constituent local authorities) gives it the mandate to convene the whole system.

Self-assessment: Convene

	EMERGING	ESTABLISHED	LEADING
Governance	Anchor institutions meet periodically, share international plans and identify a named lead for international engagement in the strategic authority	Regular formal and informal dialogue across partners; shared priorities and a common narrative; co-ordinated activity on joint missions, shared intelligence and co-designed bids	Formally constituted cross-sector governance (Growth Company, Civic University Agreement or something similar) with dedicated resource and private sector accountability
Partner alignment	Key partner institutions — universities, cultural bodies, local authorities — are aware of the strategic authority's international ambitions and share relevant plans	Partners have agreed roles and contributions across the core strands of international activity; incentive structures are understood and tensions are proactively managed	Formal shared agreement across local partners aligns university internationalisation strategies with the strategic authority's international programme; cultural and local authority contributions are embedded in shared delivery plans

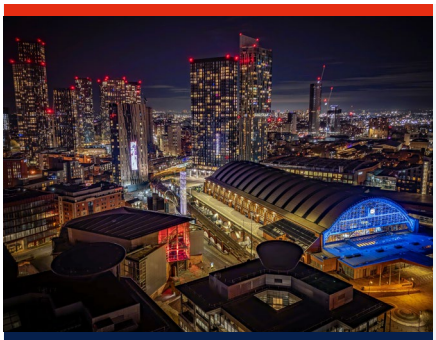
From Emerging to Established: Convene a joint session with an investment agency or Growth Company, anchor universities and major cultural institutions to agree shared priorities and named ownership of each strand of international activity.

From Established to Leading: Establish or strengthen the Growth Company model: private sector governance, integrated scope across each strand and dedicated resource to manage international relationships. Formalise the university partnership through a Civic University Agreement with explicit international engagement commitments. Begin scoping a whole-place agreement for your most mature bilateral relationship.

ADVANCED PRACTICE: LOCAL AND REGIONAL AGREEMENTS (LARAS)

A new mechanism — what this toolkit describes as a Local and Regional Agreements (LARA) — is one route to formalise collaboration between anchor institutions around shared international priorities. A LARA could bring together the strategic authority, local authorities, universities, cultural organisations, sporting bodies and major employers under a formal framework for aligned international engagement, explicitly unlocking diplomatic assets that currently sit unused in individual institutions.

Case studies



CASE STUDY

Invest Manchester: Greater Manchester, UK

Greater Manchester

Invest Manchester (formerly known as MIDAS) began as a partnership between Bruntwood (a private developer) and Manchester City Council, covering only the city's geography. Over two decades it evolved into a wholly GMCA-owned growth company arm, operating across all ten Greater Manchester authorities with dedicated international teams, sector-specific advisory fora (Japan Steering Group, Bangladesh Partnership Board) and integrated metrics. The journey from informal to formal governance took deliberate investment in governance and decisions about scope and ownership over time.



CASE STUDY

Derbyshire: Toyota City, UK

Derbyshire: Toyota City

The Toyota City Partnership Board — composed of stakeholders including three local authorities, Toyota UK and latterly the East Midlands Combined County Authority — demonstrates how longstanding twinning arrangements can evolve into structured governance. Pooled funding, a formal Terms of Reference, rotating Chair and private-sector co-investment created durability across political cycles.

Key actions

- [ ] Audit current governance and ownership of existing international initiatives
- [ ] Convene anchor institutions and place partners to review the assets and opportunity analysis shared priorities and named ownership of each strand of activity.
- [ ] Map incentive structures of key partner institutions to surface differences and explore how to align them.
- [ ] Establish structures for senior leaders and operational leads to meet regularly, agree and act jointly on identified priorities and plans — including private sector, local and strategic authority, universities, anchor cultural institutions.
- [ ] Establish rhythm of meetings to share information and align effects across different institutions and priorities.
- [ ] Codify ways of working through a clear Terms of Reference.

PHASE ONE

Step 3: Decide

SPOTLIGHT ON GLOBAL INSTABILITY

Geopolitical instability is not only a risk to manage — it is a source of opportunity for places that have done the foundational work. Partners in other countries who are recalibrating their own international relationships are actively looking for new counterparts. Canadian firms redirecting investment away from the US market, Indian businesses diversifying their international footprint, European partners reassessing supply chain dependencies following trade disruption: these are live openings for English city-regions with clear, specific propositions.

A credible strategy will aim to engage two to three markets deeply rather than jam spreading across multiple markets. A tiering framework based on the depth of alignment across the region's full spectrum of international ambitions helps to distinguish priority markets where deep bilateral relationships are being actively developed across multiple fronts from second-tier markets, where specific opportunities are pursued opportunistically with lighter investment, and from markets kept under watching brief.

MARKET PRIORITISATION FRAMEWORK

TIER	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE MECHANISM
Priority markets	Strong complementarity between place assets and market demand across strategic and local authority analysis, anchor institutions' international direction and the business base. These are the markets that warrant dedicated resource and mayoral engagement. Outcomes targets set and tracked.	Formal partnership – official agreements approved by formal governance requiring sustained commitment and prioritisation.
Second-tier markets	Partial alignment, emerging or discrete opportunity for a subset of regional partners. Resourcing is time-limited and contained.	Letter of support or Memorandum of Understanding – semi-formal agreements relating to a specific project or sector.
Watching brief	Relationships exist at partner institution level; pan-regional leadership is informed but not active. Resourcing is light touch and reviewed regularly.	Networks and coalitions – participation in formal and informal membership organisations.

Don't set yourself up to fail

The most consistent lesson from pioneering global regions is sequencing: build the ecosystem first, then market it. Places that launch into international promotion before establishing a credible internal proposition spend resources attracting investors that they are not ready to receive. The international engagement that endures is demand-led in both directions: a place that is strong in a sector will generate inbound enquiry.

In practice, market selection should be accompanied by an assessment of internal readiness. A mission that surfaces genuine investor interest in a proposition that cannot be delivered does more damage than no mission at all — it undermines relationships and credibility that can take time to rebuild.

Organising for outcomes

Each partner will have different goals and ambitions they are seeking to achieve through the International Strategy, based on their respective needs. Curating a shared understanding and agreement on priority outcomes across the partnership (and thereby the different aspects of international activity) is an essential task. An outcomes framework and associated logic model should be developed as part of the strategy setting out what will be achieved, how and how progress towards success will be tracked. Overall ownership of this framework should be shared and, to promote cross-sector collaboration, expressed in relation to target customer groups and markets, rather than the goals of individual partners.

EXAMPLE OUTCOME MEASURES

Investment mobilised:
FDI, social investment, private wealth, diaspora philanthropy, firms relocated, jobs created.

Research catalysed:
Income and R&D partnerships established, joint grant applications submitted and won, spinout activity from place-based collaborations.

Talent attracted:
Student and worker attraction (including overseas students), graduate retention rates.

Route connectivity secured:
Visas, direct flights

Sectoral profile:
Conference hosting, international ranking movement, inbound enquiry volume

Cultural and civic partnerships boosted:
Secondments, exchanges, visitor spend.

Place brand amplified:
Increased visibility and influence of the region and its place leaders.

Equity of benefits:
Outcomes reaching areas beyond the urban core.

Self-assessment: Decide

	EMERGING	ESTABLISHED	LEADING
Strategic clarity	A statement of international ambitions exists — likely embedded in the Local Growth Plan or a short standalone document — with named sector priorities and broad market areas	A published International Strategy names specific priority markets, differentiates objectives by strand, and passes the Tipp-Ex test	A co-owned International Strategy is the basis for cross-sector collaboration, joint venturing and co-investment. It is reviewed on a defined cycle and adapted in response to market and geopolitical shifts
Market selection	Priority markets are identified based on existing relationships and Local Growth Plan sector alignment	Markets are tiered — priority and second-tier — based on comparative analysis of complementarity, competitive landscape and access routes. Zombie partnerships are identified	Market selection is differentiated by strand and reviewed annually. Second-tier markets are actively developed toward priority status. Geopolitical shifts are monitored as triggers for market recalibration
Measurement	Activity is tracked within the strategic authority. Reporting is periodic and internally focused	A measurement framework covers all aspects of the international strategy with agreed metrics. Reporting is shared across key partner institutions	A shared outcomes framework is published annually jointly by the place partnership. Metrics are differentiated by strand and market. The framework is used to redirect resource between activities

From Emerging to Established:

Apply the tiering framework to your existing relationships. Identify which are genuinely priorities, which are second-tier, and which are 'zombie partnerships' — relationships that consume officer time without generating value. Retiring these partnerships is as important as identifying new ones, and signals strategic seriousness to both domestic partners and international counterparts. It is not unprecedented, with Doncaster reviewing and cancelling its international relationships in 2011.

From Established to Leading:

Differentiate market selection by strand of international activity — a market that is priority for investment or talent attraction may be second-tier for research partnerships or trade. Build a process for annual market review that incorporates geopolitical intelligence, strand-specific performance data and partner institution input. Promote second-tier markets to priority when the conditions are right — and demote priority markets when they are not delivering.

ADVANCED PRACTICE: NAVIGATING SENSITIVE MARKETS

Not all markets carry equal risk. China, Russia and certain Gulf states present specific due diligence requirements around national security, human rights and beneficial ownership. The Edinburgh-Kaohsiung example, where a proposed friendship agreement became politically sensitive following Chinese pressure, illustrates how sub-national actors can inadvertently position the UK within wider geopolitical disputes.

Before entering formal relationships in sensitive markets, consult DBIST and the FCDO's Overseas Business Risk Guidance and your own legal team. Widen the circle of advisors beyond the single relationship-holder to include peers and relevant academic institutions with foreign policy expertise. Establish a proportionate screening protocol. Informal engagement does not require the same level of scrutiny as a formal MoU, but both require awareness of the operating environment.

Case studies

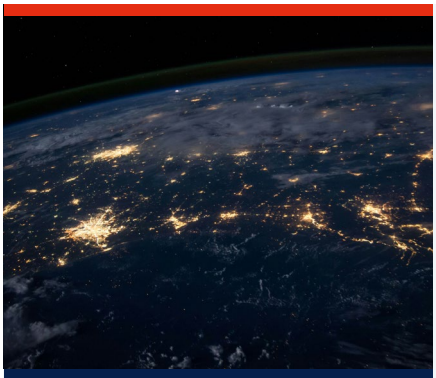


CASE STUDY

Flanders Investment & Trade

Flanders Investment & Trade

After restructuring, FIT moved from broad-scope promotion to 'meaningful marketing' around 'hero customers' — specific investor segments where Flanders' semiconductor and creative industries capability provided a decisive competitive advantage. The strategy named specific investor segments, specific capability nodes and specific outcome targets by strand. Market selection was differentiated: Asian markets for creative industries, North American and Asian for semiconductors. The result was legible, competitive positioning where generic regional brands are invisible.



CASE STUDY

Greater Manchester, UK

Greater Manchester, UK

GMCA's International Strategy differentiates objectives by market and strand: Japan (net-zero collaboration, technology partnership, cultural exchange), Austin (tech sector growth, Friendship City), Ruhr (climate and cyber), Sylhet (diaspora and sustainability), Indiana (radiotherapy research cluster). The strategy names specific outcome types by market — FDI quantum for some, research partnerships for others, diaspora investment for others. A Leading example of differentiated strategic choice.

Key actions at Stage 3

- [ ] Apply the market tiering framework to all existing relationships — categorise as priority, second-tier, watching brief or zombie partnership.
- [ ] Formally retire zombie partnerships — communicate clearly to counterparts and redirect officer time.
- [ ] Use the capital and partnership types navigator to differentiate approach by capital type within each priority market.
- [ ] Draft co-owned International Strategy with specific plans across all strands of international activity and all priority markets.
- [ ] Agree measurement framework with key partners before publication.
- [ ] Establish a sensitive markets screening protocol and apply it before entering any new formal relationship in a high-risk context.
- [ ] Publish the strategy and set a two-year review cycle.

PHASE TWO

DELIVERY

Put the strategy into action.
Build the relationships.
Remove the barriers.

The Delivery phase turns the International Strategy into outcomes: targeted outreach to accelerate priority outcomes (Activate), and deliberate curation that converts those relationships into lasting commitments across all strands of international activity (Curate).

As you deliver your International Strategy, new intelligence about your assets, your markets and your partnerships will emerge which should be fed back to inform updates to the strategy. As you deepen global relationships, the governance and structures will need to adapt. This feedback loop between Delivery and Development is where places generate compounding returns from their international engagement.

PHASE TWO

Step 4: Activate

Investment	Capital follows conviction, and conviction follows evidence. Investors (whether corporate FDI, impact capital or private wealth) need to see a credible, specific pipeline before they commit resources to due diligence. Your job is to make investable opportunities legible: sector propositions with named assets, site-ready land, incentive structures and deal precedents. The channels that reach investment audiences are intermediaries, lawyers, advisers, diaspora investor networks, sector conference programmes. Being present at the right events, such as MIPIM or UKREiiF, matters less than having something specific and credible to show when you are there.
Research collaborations	Research partnerships begin with recognition, a counterpart institution or funder knowing that a specific capability exists in a specific place. The most effective visibility tool is presence in global knowledge communities: hosting international academic conferences in priority sectors, contributing to joint publications and grant consortia, and ensuring that university research strengths are named explicitly in the place proposition rather than referenced generically. International conferences are particularly high-leverage: they bring global research communities physically to the city-region and create concentrated introductions between institutions that may otherwise never meet.
Culture and visitor economy	Co-productions and touring partnerships with counterparts in priority markets, bidding to host international festivals, competitions and cultural events that create recurring inbound visits, and using existing cultural relationships as a route into institutional introductions. The visitor economy is not separate from the investment proposition. A place that is legible, attractive and well-known to international visitors is easier to invest in. They reinforce each other when they are treated as a shared programme.

AMPLIFYING WITH AUTHENTICITY

Civic networks like C40, Eurocities, and ICLEI can multiply the effect of brand-building. These are working networks: passive membership yields little, but active participation in working groups and international visits builds relationships with global peers and access to funded collaboration programmes. The return on network participation is disproportionate to its cost, generating introductions that bilateral diplomacy cannot reach as efficiently.

Likewise, diaspora communities are underused activation assets that work in both directions. People with roots in your place who are now based in priority markets carry your proposition with them — as business leaders, researchers, cultural figures and alumni. People from priority markets now living in your place can make introductions, build bridges and open doors back to their home institutions and networks. Engaging both groups deliberately through diaspora business councils, alumni networks and community organisations generates reach and trust.

THE ROLE OF THE MAYOR

An elected mayor is an internationally recognised brand. Their democratic mandate and public profile cam start conversations. Outbound missions, hosting inward delegations and participating in peer networks are effective ways to leverage the mayoral brand but these need to be executed with strategic clarity and with support from dedicated relationship managers before and after.

MODEL MISSION PLANNING PROTOCOL

Before

- Co-design the programme with your private sector, cultural and academic partners
- Agree and document clear objectives for the mission with partners upfront
- Co-ordinate with the DBIST and FCDO overseas network, Trade Envoys and diaspora networks

During

- Reserve the Mayor's time for the most important conversations: political counterparts, senior investors, decision-makers inaccessible to others
- Business delegates lead commercial conversations; mayor provides political framing and mandate

After

- Debrief circulated within five working days: named relationships, agreed next steps, clear ownership of each
- Outcomes published — publicly, within a defined period

TRANSPARENCY AND THE POLITICS OF MAYORAL TRAVEL

The most common political vulnerability of international engagement programmes is the perception that trade missions are 'jollies for politicians.' The defence is pre-emptive transparency. Before each significant mission, publish the objective, the target outcomes and the partner organisations being visited. After each mission, publish what was agreed, what follow-up is planned and the anticipated timeline to conversion.

The case is not hard to make when outcomes are clear. If a mission produces a firm relocation or a research partnership activation, publish it. If it produces warm relationships that need follow-up, say so, and publish the follow-up when it converts. Transparency requires honesty about what international engagement is for and what it is producing.

Self-assessment: Engage

	EMERGING	ESTABLISHED	LEADING
Mayoral deployment	Mayor attends set-piece events; engagement is largely reactive	Mayor deploys to priority markets; missions are co-designed with private sector and followed up systematically	Mayor's international calendar is set 12+ months ahead, and linked explicitly to declared strategic objectives
Relationship management	Limited follow-up after missions	Named relationship managers track warm contacts; follow-up happens within defined timelines; no relationship lapses without a conscious decision	A dedicated relationship management function` actively develops warm contacts toward readiness for Stage 05; the pipeline is visible, owned and regularly reviewed
Targeted marketing and networks	Presence at major trade events; membership of peer networks; visibility is reactive to invitations	Targeted marketing reaches priority audiences; active and purposeful participation in strategically aligned peer networks	Place proposition is embedded across investor, R&D, cultural and peer network channels; network participation generates hosting opportunities and inbound pipeline

From Emerging to Established: Establish a dedicated relationship management function with a named person or people and a means to track relationships and advance actions across your international priorities.

From Established to Leading: Develop a place brand that integrates and celebrates different aspects of your place proposition, reaching multiple audiences at once. From hosting flagship events to curating sector awards, Leading places create platforms which spotlight their unique strengths and draw people in, creating spillover benefits for the visitor economy and investment.

ADVANCED PRACTICE: LEVERAGING NATIONAL DIPLOMACY ASSETS

FCDO and DBIST Overseas Network:
Regular communication with officials in the embassies and consulates of your key markets will enable the flow of sector intelligence and put your region 'front of mind' when they identify early-stage leads or high-growth companies looking for a UK base.

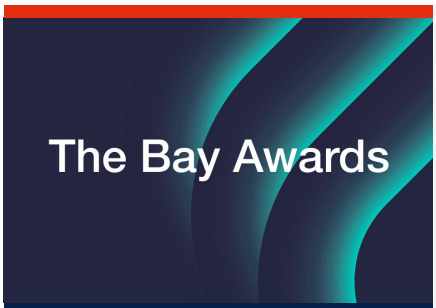
The GREAT Campaign:
Collaborate directly to integrate your region's unique propositions into the campaign and leverage its global reach to amplify your marketing.

The British Council: Civic and cultural networks can help identify diaspora influencers and institutional partners that build the long-term trust required for later commercial or research success.

VisitBritain: The Destination Development Partnership programme provides a structured mechanism for regions to co-design international marketing, as piloted by the North East and Greater Manchester.

Trade Envoys: Use these powerful political assets to engage political gatekeepers and unstick stalled negotiations in sensitive or emerging markets where high-level state backing provides essential credibility

Case studies

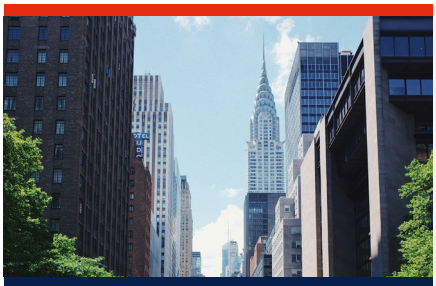


CASE STUDY

Bay Awards, Bilbao/ Biscay

Reinventing a place brand

The Biscay regional government's Bay Awards platform uses international recognition programmes to build relationships with innovation ecosystems in Asia and North America. The awards function both as a market intelligence engine, identifying global leaders in target sectors, and as relationship building infrastructure, bringing prospective international partners into sustained contact with the Biscay proposition.



CASE STUDY

USA East Coast Mission, Liverpool City Region

USA international mission

Liverpool City Region's New York, Massachusetts and Boston mission produced a Kindrell IT services relocation, built on a relationship the LCR team had warmed over months. Co-ordinated with Deputy Mayor engagement in China and Bloomberg peer network activity, the mission demonstrated multiple strands running simultaneously under a shared strategic framework — and the mayor's role as a catalyst.

Key actions at Stage 3

- [ ] Design the mayor's international calendar 12 months ahead, linked to strategic priorities.
- [ ] Map cultural institutions and university research centres with dormant or underdeveloped relationships in priority markets and facilitate and fund catalytic reactivation.
- [ ] Bid to host at least one major international event per year in a priority sector.
- [ ] Develop a targeted marketing programme for private capital and impact investment audiences.
- [ ] Pursue active participation in prioritised membership networks, such as C40.
- [ ] Connect with national structures like Trade Envoys, VisitBritain and the GREAT Campaign to amplify impact.

PHASE TWO

Step 5: Curate

Curate the conditions that turn warm relationships into lasting outcomes.

The goal at this stage is to ensure that every strand of your international strategy has a clear pathway from warm relationship to agreed outcome, and that partners you have worked to attract receive the same quality of attention as those you are still pursuing.

Key outputs: Whole-place curation function across all aspects of international strategy; cross-strand connections deliberately managed; existing partnerships deepened and expanded alongside new attractions.

Place curation and the curator's role

Place marketing creates the conditions for interest. Place curation creates the conditions for commitment, and for the kind of sustained, generative relationships that make a place genuinely attractive over time.

The skills required to attract a prospective partner are not the same as those required to convert and retain one. Where outreach professionals reach and inspire new connections, curators navigate systems, remove friction and attend to the whole-place experience: the ease of doing business, the quality of the innovation ecosystem, the general liveability of the place, the accessibility of the cultural offer.

The capability gap this creates is real and underestimated. The professional formation that produces an effective investment promotor (short time horizons, transaction focus, comfort with rejection) is actively counterproductive in the curatorial role. Places that measure their international engagement function against a single pipeline metric will select for and reward the wrong skills for the harder, slower work of building the ecosystem that makes a place worth investing in, studying in, visiting and partnering with.

CURATOR CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK		
	HUNTER	**CURATOR**
Primary orientation	Identifying and securing new partners and commitments	Deepening, sustaining and expanding existing partnerships
Time horizon	Short to medium term — pipeline and conversion	Long term — ecosystem health and partner success
Primary relationships	Prospective investors, research leads, cultural partners, export markets	Existing partners, anchor employers, intermediaries, diaspora and community networks
Success metrics	New commitments landed; pipeline volume; missions completed	Partner retention and expansion; referrals generated; ecosystem depth
Core skills	Market intelligence; proposition presentation; negotiation; deal structuring	Relationship stewardship; problem-solving; cross-sector fluency; cultural intelligence
Institutional home	International engagement team: investment, trade and export functions	International engagement team; aftercare; university research development; cultural institution leads

THE VALUE OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

The most durable international relationships are rarely a single strand. A partnership that begins as a research collaboration surfaces a talent pipeline; a talent pipeline makes an investment viable; a cultural relationship creates the institutional trust that the investment conversation needs. Greater Manchester's Osaka partnership illustrates the cumulative logic: what started as a net-zero policy exchange evolved into university research collaboration, technology trials with major Japanese firms, and sustained cultural and community exchange. No single strand owned the relationship. Its durability came from the density of connections across them.

This has an important operational implication for curation. When a relationship stalls on one strand - an investor slowed by planning, a research collaboration waiting on a funding round, a cultural partnership stalled for resource — the question a curator asks is not only how to unblock that specific barrier, but whether another strand can hold and deepen the relationship while the blockage is resolved. A place with active connections across investment, R&D, cultural exchange and visitor economy has multiple points of contact with any given partner, and multiple routes to keep the relationship moving.

The practical implication is that the strands need to be curated in concert with each other, not as parallel programmes. This requires curators who are fluent across the whole proposition, who know that the visiting research delegation also has interests in the cultural programme, that the investor considering a site visit would benefit from a soft introduction through an existing diaspora business connection, that the trade relationship that has not yet produced an obvious commercial outcome is building the bilateral trust that will eventually matter for something else.

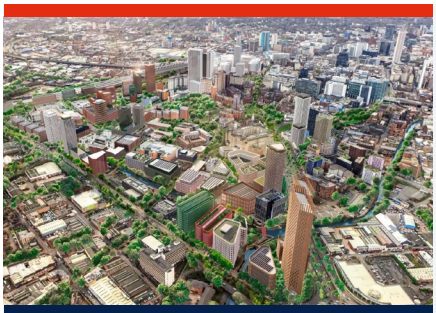
Self-assessment: Curate

	EMERGING	ESTABLISHED	LEADING
Responsive systems	A named contact exists for inward partners across the primary strands; basic internal routing to planning, skills and other relevant teams is in place	A single responsive system operates across all strands with named relationship managers, clear routing and defined response timelines	A differentiated curation function serves all strands; conversion sequences are documented and followed; the system is benchmarked against competitor locations
Cross-strand management	Relationship managers are aware of activity across strands and share intelligence informally	Cross-strand connections are actively managed; a warm relationship stalled on one strand is held through activity on another; diaspora networks are engaged as active curation partners	The global team is fluent across all strands; the programme is well resourced and regularly reviewed; cross-strand referrals and connections are tracked as an outcome in their own right
Curation and retention	Existing major partners receive regular contact; curatorial responsibility sits alongside engagement from the international engagement team	A formal aftercare programme tracks existing partners across all strands; expansion opportunities are proactively identified; diaspora networks are engaged as active curation partners	Existing partnerships receive the same analytical attention as prospective ones; the question of which relationships are deepening, static or at risk is a standing item in leadership review

From Emerging to Established: Appoint a named curator for each strand of your international strategy, with responsibility for the pathway from warm relationship to committed outcome.

From Established to Leading: Audit existing partnerships across all strands: which are expanding, which are static, which are at risk? Resource the curatorial function explicitly — not as a residual responsibility of the outreach team. The transition to Leading happens when retention receives as much leadership attention as attraction.

Case studies

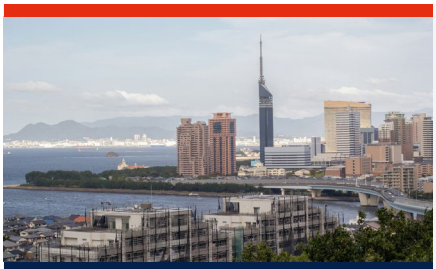


CASE STUDY

Birmingham Knowledge Quarter, UK

Birmingham Knowledge Quarter

BKQ's planning acceleration model — developed with Birmingham City Council and the Office for Investment — reduced planning timelines for knowledge-economy occupiers from years to months for priority investors. Sitting within the West Midlands Investment Zone, the incentive package integrates business rates relief, capital allowances and Stamp Duty Land Tax relief into a single, navigated offer. The lesson was systemic: removing barriers deliberately and in combination produces outcomes that piecemeal intervention does not.

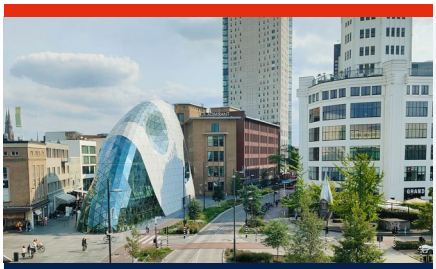


CASE STUDY

Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan

Fukuoka Prefecture

Fukuoka's designation as Japan's national regulatory test-bed — first in line for new financial services rules and startup tax incentives — resulted from sustained advocacy by the prefecture and city, working with national government allies to position Fukuoka as the ideal pilot location. Converting international engagement into outcomes requires working with national allies to create the enabling conditions, not just navigating obstacles after they arise.



CASE STUDY

Brainport Eindhoven, Netherlands

Brainport Eindhoven

Anchor employers at Brainport co-fund investment in housing, schools and community infrastructure — not as philanthropy but as a calculated precondition for their own ability to recruit internationally. The Holland Expat Center South navigates international workers through housing, banking and schooling; the Spouse Potential programme addresses the most common reason senior talent declines to relocate. The conditions that attract international talent are the same conditions that make a place attractive across every other strand.

Key actions

- [ ] Audit the Curator and Hunter balance in the international engagement team and address gaps
- [ ] Map visa and route connectivity barriers for priority markets and develop a specific advocacy plan with airport partners and the FCDO
- [ ] Co-fund catalytic cultural development with Arts Council England and others to unlock dormant exchange relationships
- [ ] Initiate conversations with anchor employers and universities about designing an international talent concierge function
- [ ] Audit existing partnerships: which are expanding, which are static, which are at risk

Invest in UK University R&D Campaign

GROUNDWORK RESEARCH

RECURVE

Favier Ltd.

MIDLANDS INNOVATION