FUTURE MOBILITY

Handbook for successful innovation collaboration

Lessons from US-Sweden projects within sustainable mobility

About this ”handbook”

What

A practical guide to starting and running US-Sweden innovation collaborations

For

Project managers on both sides of the Atlantic

By

Learnings by Swedish and American project managers from Future Mobility projects

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How this document was created

Starting point

Experiences from 38 bilateral innovation projects collected through interviews and workshops.

Approach

Developed in close collaboration with Swedish and American project managers: their experiences compared across the two countries.

Result

Concrete advice for different stages of a collaboration.

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Why work together?

From the Swedish point of view

- Access to new resources: expertise, equipment, data, regulatory space
- Learn from the “best”
- New perspectives from a wider network
- Excellent environment for start-ups to scale
- Frontier technologies and companies
- The United States is a great sparring partner and offers many quite different innovation environments
- It is relatively easy to collaborate (language, culture…)

“The United States represents a huge and important market and its innovation mindset is often more ambitious.”

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Why work together?

From the American point of view

- Global colleagues working on complementary topics
- Increased impact and results valid beyond one region
- Bridge to collaboration within the whole European Union
- Stronger sustainability focus
- International benchmarking
- Swedes are creative team players

"Collaboration with Sweden gives us a valuable opportunity to work with people bringing in new perspectives and data."

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Initiating a joint project

- Important to create a win-win collaboration
- Make sure there is a mutual understanding of needs and potential benefits
- Plan for connecting with several persons on both sides to build redundancy
- Elaborate a well-defined problem and approach to address it
- Commitment: easy to say yes, harder to sign – start early with potential legal or IPR barriers
- Organizational hierarchy: Ensure direct links to the right people

"Swedes should 'sell' their knowledge expertise better."

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The recipe for a joint project

Ingredients

- 10 oz of solid foundation
- 1 cup common vision
- 2 oz of expressed expectations
- 2 tbsp challenges
- 2 tbsp of mutual benefits
- a pinch of ambition, passion and openness

DIRECTIONS

When building a joint project, several critical aspects need attention:

The Idea

It's crucial to have more than just a desire to collaborate; a shared idea can be a solid foundation for your project. This common vision sets the stage for a successful partnership.

Expectations

Managing expectations is essential before diving into any new relationship. Ensure all participants can express their expectations, especially regarding commercialization, to align goals and avoid misunderstandings.

The Challenge and the Prize

Identify the challenges that need addressing and ensure the efforts will lead to mutual benefits. This helps in maintaining motivation and a clear focus on the project's goals.

Your Approach

Collaborative innovation can be challenging but rewarding. Approach the project with passion, ambition, an open mind, and a sense of fun. This mindset will help your team navigate obstacles and enjoy the journey.

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Managing a joint project

Aspects to consider

- Set expectations at an early stage
- Build trust: meet in person, early
- Schedule regular meetings, preferably short and frequent, and agree on day-to-day communication channels (Slack, Teams chats, shared folders…)
- Communicate progress regularly and potential problems immediately
- Accept that time zones and holidays require an extra effort on both sides
- Broaden the networks involving both partners' local networks

Possible challenges

- Speed and focus: the US moves fast, Sweden plans
- Organizational hierarchy: involve the right people

"We realized that it is very important to meet in person, preferably early in the project."

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Beyond the first project – how to maintain and further develop the innovation network

- Redundancy, connect with multiple people, do not rely only on one person on either side of the Atlantic
- Attend network events, conferences, working groups…
- Keep eyes open for funding opportunities
- Individual mobility, exchanges, sabbaticals and other stays abroad are excellent ways of continuing the collaboration and such funding is often available, at least for academics
- Sooner or later, customers will have to pay for the innovation collaboration

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About Future Mobility

Future Mobility catalyzed research and innovation collaboration within sustainable mobility between Sweden and the United States.

With dedicated resources in both countries, the Future Mobility initiative aspired to lower the thresholds to collaboration. Actors in Sweden and the United States interested in collaborations were approached with:

- Inspiration and knowledge related to collaborations between Sweden – the United States
- Matchmaking to identify relevant innovation partners
- Guidance towards potential funding sources.

During 2023 – 2026, Future Mobility funded or co-funded 38 bilateral innovation projects. Companies, research institutions and public actors were involved in the projects.

Vinnova initiated and funded Future Mobility and the Swedish Energy Agency co-funded some projects.

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