

UA Repository

Vertrouwen, verbinding en verandering: een Caribisch netwerk voor digitale data-competentie.

Item Type	Other
Citation	Open Science NL (20 May 2025). Vertrouwen, verbinding en verandering: een Caribisch netwerk voor digitale data-competentie. NWO. https://www.openscience.nl/nieuws/vertrouwen-verbinding-en-verandering-een-caribisch-netwerk-voor-digitale-data-competentie .
Publisher	NWO
Download date	2026-03-09 18:39:02
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14473/1540

Trust, forging connections, and change: a Caribbean network for digital data competence

- 20 mei 2025



With a €1 million grant from Open Science NL, the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is establishing a network to enhance digital data competencies. This is especially important, as data sharing is not yet commonplace in the region. Moreover, how do you collaborate effectively when your colleague lives on an island 800 kilometres away?

In Europe, including the European part of the Kingdom, a culture of openness has already taken root, says Esther Plomp, the network's future coordinator. She submitted the grant application on behalf of the CHECK collaboration (see box). 'Other countries often see the Netherlands as a model for how open science and data management have been promoted.' In the Caribbean region, however, attitudes remain cautious.

“We need a cultural shift and trust in other parties to enable data sharing. A network can support that shift and help build trust among the different stakeholders.”

‘Sharing data is often perceived as risky here,’ says Plomp, who is employed at the University of Aruba. ‘What if others misuse the data, or if sharing means the original researcher is no longer needed or recognised? What if the data contains errors?’ This uncertainty may lead partners to prefer maintaining control. Publishing in repositories or through journal articles is not always seen as worthwhile. ‘We need a cultural shift and trust in other parties to enable data sharing. A network can support that shift and help build trust among the different stakeholders.’

Tackling problems together

But the new network aims for more than just cultural change. ‘The islands face challenges due to a lack of specific expertise, limited capacity, and fragmented networks,’ Plomp explains. At the same time, the islands struggle with many similar issues. Collaboration within the network will allow partners to find solutions more efficiently and complement each other’s knowledge. ‘That way, people don’t have to keep investing time and energy in solving the same problems on their own.’

The decision to create a network structure was deliberate. A local or regional DCC would primarily focus on university priorities. But in the Caribbean, government bodies, NGOs, libraries, and other organisations also hold valuable knowledge, Plomp emphasises (see also text box below: ‘The research and higher education landscape in the Caribbean’). The network will give all these stakeholders an equal role.

Bringing stakeholders together

The network’s first step is to identify regional parties interested in data competence, skills development, and tackling data-related challenges together. This is a highly diverse group of potential stakeholders, Plomp says. ‘By involving all interested parties in setting up the network, we hope it will reflect their interests, making participation more accessible.’

To support this, collaboration guidelines will be developed: what is a working group, what is expected of participants, how will communication be managed? The organisers aim to operate as openly as possible themselves, setting an example or being an inspiration for the desired approach. Coordination and facilitation of the network will also be essential. Plomp will serve as the network coordinator from Aruba. In addition, there will be local coordinators on Curaçao and St. Martin, as well as administrative support.

“We’ll hold biannual gatherings, and working groups can meet more frequently.”

Events are key

One of the network’s core activities will be organising events, meetings, and working groups around topics that participants themselves find important. Training and training materials will also be made available. ‘This way, we build local capacity,’ says Plomp. ‘We hope to lower the threshold for people to get involved.’

Given the great distances between islands – up to 800 kilometres – moments of connection are crucial, both online and in person. That’s why meetings will be a major part of the project. Plomp: ‘We’ll hold biannual gatherings, and working groups can meet more frequently. We expect that participants will be enthusiastic about the

working groups they join and take a leading role within them. Our aim is to build a bottom-up network.'

Transformers

When asked about the most important outcome for her personally, Plomp highlights the training of Local Network Transformers. 'These Transformers will undergo training to take on leadership roles within the network and safeguard local interests. Ultimately, I hope this means we'll need less coordination from the universities themselves, as the partners will have the tools and capacity to lead their own initiatives.'

The research and higher education landscape in the Caribbean

There are four major higher education and research institutions across the countries of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands:

- University of St. Martin
- University of Aruba
- University of Curaçao
- Instituto Pedagógico Arubano

These institutions receive both public and private funding and are eligible for many NWO grants. In 2024, the institutions joined forces to form CHECK: the Caribbean Higher Education Council of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The aim is to foster collaboration in education, research, and knowledge exchange. The recently awarded grant application was submitted on behalf of CHECK.

In addition, there are smaller institutions offering higher professional education and/or conducting research. Many of these institutions also collaborate closely with partners in the European Netherlands. Finally, there also medical universities located in the Caribbean.