



## Not a project, but a permanent unit within the institution

An interview with Ellen Bastiaens, Maastricht University  
By Maureen van Althuis

Photo: Joey Roberts

**EDLAB, Maastricht University's Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL), successfully participated in the first round of funding applications and was awarded a subsidy. Ellen Bastiaens, EDLAB's Director, reflects on intensive writing days, reviewing proposals from other CTLs, and the value of commitment.**

**You guided EDLAB's funding application. What insights can you share with others?**

"In our CTL funding application, EDLAB engaged everyone involved from the very beginning. We communicated timelines, set clear deadlines, and had in-depth discussions about the content. This approach required a considerable time investment but proved worthwhile. I avoided lengthy explanatory emails, and when I had questions, I got quick responses because everyone was aligned with the project's goals."

**What focus areas within your CTL will benefit most from the funding?**

"For our funding application, EDLAB outlined three main ambitions. One key focus is digital literacy. While we're already active in this area, the subsidy allows us to expand and enhance our efforts. Another priority is improving our digital platform – a knowledge portal for lecturers. Our goal is to centralise resources, making it easier for educators to find information and support without navigating multiple channels."

The third ambition connects these goals: creating a faculty-specific model to improve the organisation of teaching support at the faculty level, ensuring lecturers have a clear point of contact. This is a new approach for us, and we've learned a lot from our partner institution, Radboud University in Nijmegen."

**So you're collaborating with other institutions on developing the CTL at Maastricht University. Can you tell us more?**

"During the application process, we worked closely with Radboud University and the Open University, reviewing each other's drafts at every stage, from early notes to final proposals. This collaboration has been so productive that we've already outlined joint projects, such as exploring the impact of a CTL.

We highlighted this collaboration in our application and have also started building connections with vocational schools and universities of applied sciences, though these relationships are still primarily personal. I strongly believe in nationwide and cross-sector collaboration, but to keep things practical within the three-year funding period, we needed to focus on manageable goals.

We began with partners we already knew or who are geographically nearby, such as VISTA College for vocational education and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. At Zuyd, for example, I supported a colleague by reviewing a proposal for the second funding round."

**You applied in the first funding round. Was that a deliberate decision?**

"I enjoy pioneering and have an adventurous mindset, so with EDLAB, we deliberately chose to apply in the first round. I saw opportunities.

We already had several projects where I wanted to achieve more, like the three ambitions I mentioned earlier. But EDLAB is engaged in much more than that. Since its founding in 2015 as an institute for education innovation, one of our proudest achievements was a large-scale study in 2018 that confirmed Problem-Based Learning (PBL) remains relevant, future-proof, and effective for our education model.

Then COVID struck, followed by the cyberattack on our university, which led to the 'Technology Enhanced Education' initiative. Beyond EDLAB, we saw university-wide efforts that aligned perfectly with the vision of a CTL.

In 2022, I was asked to consolidate these various initiatives. This led us to re-evaluate and reposition EDLAB. When the Npuls programme launched and CTLs became a topic of focus, our team immediately said, 'Let's seize the moment.'"

### **What are your initial experiences following the approval of the application?**

"Along with 18 other institutions, we joined the first cohort of the support programme. During meetings organised by Npuls, we're building connections, exploring concepts like the Theory of Change, and discussing governance structures to help achieve our goals. The aim is to create a learning community together, which I'm really excited about."

### **What do you think was the key factor in the success of your application?**

"By early 2023, we had restructured EDLAB to focus not only on education innovation but also on strengthening our teaching and learning community.

The decisive factor was the commitment of our Executive Board to the CTL activities. Their support was explicitly documented, which allowed me to confidently state in the application that sustainability was non-negotiable – the Executive Board considers EDLAB a permanent part of Maastricht University."

### **Finally, what advice would you give to institutions preparing their funding applications?**

"Plan dedicated writing days! Allocate enough time and start early to define the framework for your ambitions. The writing process, along with the thinking that underpins it, requires careful attention.

The application format has strict word limits and structure, so it's helpful to isolate yourself with your team, focus on writing, and allow time for reflection. But be prepared – it's a demanding process."

***English translation: EDLAB***

[Original article in Npuls Magazine, 3rd edition, December 2024](#)