

BiBB: Bringing STEM Expertise into the Heart of Governance

– DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/2026204>

Across Europe, physicists and other STEM researchers frequently express concern that major policy decisions on climate, energy, technology and health are made with too little scientific expertise at the table.

Yet, paradoxically, very few STEM MSc students, PhD graduates, and postdocs see public administration or politics as realistic, intellectually satisfying career paths. In the Netherlands, we created the *Bèta in Bestuur & Beleid* (BiBB – “STEM for Governance and Policy”) initiative from the bottom-up to change exactly that. We hope that sharing our experience will stimulate discussion among STEM communities in other countries facing similar challenges and perhaps encourage the development of comparable initiatives.

Founded in 2021, BiBB is a national, interdisciplinary network that brings together members from multiple universities, ranging from PhD candidates to faculty members. It is supported by the wider Dutch STEM ecosystem, including NWO, the Dutch Research Council, and the deans of science and engineering faculties.

At the core of BiBB is a simple idea: building a career pipeline from research into governance. The initiative offers inspiration sessions at universities, an annual national career day for MSc and PhD students and postdocs (with 150 participants, and which has been oversubscribed every year), and an intensive week-long summer school with senior policymakers and civil servants. The aim is to demystify public-sector work, show its intellectual challenge, and give early-career researchers a concrete sense of what it means to serve in ministries, advisory councils, parliament or local government.

The BiBB summer school, first held in 2025, is emblematic of this approach. The 30 participants worked on real policy cases with leaders such as Robbert Dijkgraaf and Eppo Bruins (both physicists and former Dutch Ministers of Education, Culture and Science) and Laura van Hazendonk,

who combined her PhD training in chemistry with being a member of the provincial council of Noord-Brabant. Under their guidance, the participants developed professional skills that are rarely taught in STEM curricula: how public institutions work, how to navigate political timelines, how framing works and how to communicate complex issues under pressure. A sustained alumni network supports participants as they move into public-sector roles. The next BiBB summer school will be held early September 2026.

Beyond training, BiBB actively works on cultural change within the STEM community. Through national media, conference sessions and collaboration with scientific councils, the initiative challenges the idea that moving into policy represents a “loss” of scientific identity. Instead, it frames governance as a high-impact arena where STEM expertise is indispensable. In doing so, BiBB has established a nationally embedded pathway that did not exist before and has

begun to shift how STEM researchers in the Netherlands perceive careers in public governance and policy. At the same time, BiBB emphasizes that embedding scientific thinking in public institutions is not about replacing political judgment with technical expertise. Rather, it ensures that when decisions are made in the face of uncertainty, the analytical mindset of scientists, such as attention to assumptions, limits, evidence, and complexity, is also present, thereby strengthening the decision-making process.

To summarize, by connecting STEM researchers to governance, BiBB strengthens public institutions while offering young researchers meaningful opportunities to make a societal impact. More broadly, initiatives like BiBB may serve as examples for STEM communities in other countries that wish to strengthen the presence of scientific expertise in public decision-making. ■

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▼ BiBB Summer School participants during (left) a simulation of negotiations on a new EU budget, and (right) during a lecture by former chair of the Dutch senate, Jan Antonie Bruin, August 2025.

