Culture & Creativity

Co-funded by the European Union

Open call for proposals Financial Support to Startups and Scaleups (Shape & Scale)

Frequently Asked Questions

EIT Culture & Creativity

Cologne|07/09/2026

https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/

Contents

Document History

Version 1.0 (2026)

Changelog

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	07/09/2026	Initial version

1. General questions

Question 1.1 What is the objective of this Open Call?

The call aims to identify and support high potential startups and scaleups operating Architecture, Audiovisual Media and Fashion Industries through a combination of financial support and tailored venture support services. The programme is designed to strengthen commercialisation capacity, investment readiness, access to markets, and long-term growth potential.

Question 1.2 What type of support is provided?

Selected ventures will receive:

- Financial support,
- Access to structured acceleration or post acceleration support,
- Coaching and upskilling activities,
- Investor and corporate matchmaking opportunities,
- Access to the EIT Culture & Creativity ecosystem and network,
- Join in-person events and activities such as kick off, demo day.

Question 1.3 Which programme pathway will the selected ventures join?

Selected applicants will be allocated to one of the following pathways:

- Shape Acceleration Programme, for pre-seed or seed-stage ventures with a validated product and paying customers that they can prove with tangible evidence such as type of paying customers, users, commercial partners, or active pilots, key contracts, commercial agreements, partnerships, or pilots signed during the last 12 months.
- Scale Post Acceleration Programme, for scaling ventures actively raising post-seed funding, or have secured investment in the past 18 months.

Question 1.4 What is the Shape Acceleration Programme?

The Shape Accelerator Programme is designed for early-stage startups that have validated an initial market need and are beginning to generate traction, revenues, or pilot customers, but still require support to strengthen product-market fit, refine their business model, and prepare for larger-scale commercial growth and future investment.

Question 1.5 What is the Scale Post Acceleration Programme?

The Scale Post Acceleration Programme is designed for **mature startups and scaleups** that are preparing for international scaling, fundraising execution, and accelerated market expansion.

Question 1.6 What are the programme start dates?

Both programmes will start in January 2027.

Question 1.7 What is the purpose of the Financial Support to Startups and Scaleups call?

This call provides financial support and structured growth support to startups and scaleups with high growth potential operating in the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI). It targets ventures developing tech-enabled, market-driven, and IP-leveraged solutions capable of scaling commercially, generating economic and societal value, and strengthening the competitiveness of Europe's creative economy. Through a single application process, companies may access different funding and support depending on their stage of development and investment readiness.

Question 1.8 What type of financial support is provided under the call?

Financial support is provided under an actual-cost reimbursement model. Eligible costs are reimbursed subject to the applicable funding ceiling, approved budget and programme requirements. The maximum reimbursement rate is up to 100% of eligible project costs.

Question 1.9 What are the maximum funding amounts available?

The funding tiers are:

- Shape: up to EUR 100,000, with potential additional support of up to EUR 100,000 following Demo Day for selected top performing startups.
- Scale – non-RIS / Scale 100-To-Watch: up to EUR 200,000.
- Scale – RIS: up to EUR 500,000.

Question 1.10 How does this call differ from funding opportunities available under the Creative Europe programme?

This call is fundamentally a venture growth and investment programme for startups and scaleups promoted by EIT Culture & Creativity, while most Creative Europe calls support collaborative cultural and creative projects focused on cultural, artistic, media, audience, cooperation, or capacity-building objectives.

Question 1.11 Is this financial support programme expected to be offered annually?

We intend to continue supporting startups and scaleups through future cohorts.

Question 1.12 Could you provide a more detailed schedule for the 2027 call?

At the moment, there is no published detailed schedule for the 2027 call beyond what is stated in the current Guidelines.

Question 1.13 Where will the in-person sessions of the Shape and Scale programmes take place?

The locations have not yet been confirmed. However, the in-person sessions will take place within the EU.

Question 1.14 Are examples of successful applications or applications from previous years available to help applicants understand what makes a strong application?

You can visit our website to explore the 100-to-Watch portfolio and learn more about the ventures selected through our programmes. https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/what-we-do/business-creation/100-to-watch https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/what-we-do/business-creation/100-to-watch?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Question 1.15 Can you provide examples of financiers or sponsors that have supported EIT Culture & Creativity alumni following their participation in the programme?

100-to-Watch ventures have accessed a variety of funding opportunities, ranging from angel investors and venture capital (VC) investors to public grants.

Question 1.16 Does the financial support provided under this call fall under the EU de minimis State aid rules?

No. The financial support awarded under this call is provided from EIT/Horizon Europe funding through the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism and is not granted under the EU de minimis State aid rules. Applicants must nevertheless comply with the applicable rules on double funding and cumulation of public support. In particular, the same eligible costs cannot be financed twice. Any separate national, regional or other public funding received by the applicant remains subject to the State aid or de minimis rules applicable to that funding.

Question 1.17 How should applicants determine which priority area their solution belongs to when it covers more than one sector?

Cross-sectoral applications are welcome across Audio-Visual Media, Architecture and Fashion. Applicants must, however, select one priority area in the application form. If a solution spans multiple sectors, applicants should select the area that best represents their core market, value proposition, and expected impact. Examples of solutions and their description can be found in call guidelines Annex VI - Examples of potential solutions

2. Admissibility & eligibility rules

Question 2.1 Which sectors are eligible under the call?

This call supports ventures operating in the following priority areas:

- Fashion
- Architecture
- Audio Visual Media

Question 2.2 Who can apply?

Applications must be submitted by a single for-profit legal entity that meets the applicable requirements of the selected programme. Individuals, informal teams and ventures that are not legally incorporated by the call deadline are not eligible. Applicants must also be registered in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal and have a nine-digit PIC number.

Applicants must:

- Be legally established entities in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe associated country,
- Be a for profit companies,
- Operate within one or more eligible CCSI sectors,
- Demonstrate a scalable and innovation driven business model.
- Operating in fashion, AVM or architecture
- Committed to growth in Europe.

Question 2.3 Are NGOs, associations, or foundations eligible?

No. Only for-profit legal entities are eligible under this call. NGOs, associations, cooperatives, and foundations are not eligible.

Question 2.4 Does the call include Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion requirements?

Yes. Applicants are expected to demonstrate meaningful consideration of Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, GEDI, principles throughout the development and implementation of their activities.

Question 2.5 Which ventures does the Shape programme target?

The programme targets pre seed and seed startups that:

- Demonstrate proven traction or early revenues,
- Have a scalable business model,
- Are preparing for investment readiness and go to market acceleration.
- At least one founder working full-time on the venture,
- At least one founder with domain expertise in the relevant sector (e.g., Master’s/PhD or relevant professional practice),
- Team must include complementary skills (creativity, technology, business) or a plan to address gaps,

- Real market traction supported by proven revenue,
- Core product/technology must be the primary revenue driver,
- Open to equity dilution and external investment.

Question 2.6 Is prior fundraising mandatory for Shape applicants?

No. Previous fundraising from private or institutional investors is not a requirement for participation in the Shape programme.

Question 2.7 Which ventures does the Scale programme target?

The programme targets ventures that are actively raising capital or have recently secured investment and are ready to accelerate international expansion. In addition to that, ventures must:

- Demonstrate strong commercial or investor traction,
- Operate with a technology enabled and scalable business model,
- Are actively fundraising or recently funded,
- Show international growth ambition.
- Strong founding team with in-house technical expertise,
- Clear competitive advantage,
- Early presence or validation in multiple EU markets,
- Ideally, core IP retained within Europe

Question 2.8 Is active fundraising required for Scale applicants?

Yes. Applicants must either:

- be actively fundraising with a lead investor and signed term sheet(s) worth at least EUR 200,000 or
- have secured at least EUR 200,000 from qualified investor(s) within the past 18 months.

In all cases, a signed term sheet or equivalent is required as proof.

Question 2.9 Can pre-revenue ventures apply to Scale?

The Scale Post-Acceleration Programme provides financial support to scaling-stage ventures — mature startups and scale-ups that have already demonstrated strong product-market fit, recurring revenues, customer growth, and international scaling potential, and are now seeking to accelerate expansion through external investment and market scaling.

Question 2.10 Are dedicated slots reserved for 100 to Watch ventures?

Yes. EIT Culture & Creativity reserves 2 dedicated funding slots (in the scope of this cohort) within the Scale programme for eligible ventures already included in the 100 to Watch portfolio.

Question 2.11 Are there any country restrictions?

Yes. Applicants must be established in EU Member States or countries associated with Horizon Europe (Pillar III) at the time of the call publication. Entities are not eligible if they are:

- Established in Russia, Belarus, or non-government controlled territories of Ukraine
- Owned (directly or indirectly, >50%) by entities established in Russia
- Certain Hungarian public interest trusts and entities that are subject to the restrictions established under Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506. (these may participate only without receiving funding)

Countries that become associated to Horizon Europe after the call publication are not eligible for this call. Applicants must also not be subject to EU restrictive measures or other exclusions preventing them from receiving EU funding. The applicable list of countries participating in Horizon Europe should be consulted to verify country eligibility.

Question 2.12 Which countries are eligible?

Applicants must be legally established in an EU Member State or a country associated with the relevant Horizon Europe pillar, subject to the conditions and restrictions specified in the call. Please see the List of participating countries.

Question 2.13 Must the applicant be legally established in an eligible country by the application deadline?

Yes. The call states that ventures that are not legally incorporated by the call deadline are not eligible.

Question 2.14 Can an applicant change its legal entity after submitting the application but before contracting?

No. Change of legal entity cannot be done after deadline. Entity must remain the same for contracting.

Question 2.15 Does the Audio-Visual Media priority area include film and animation?

The Audio-Visual Media priority area covers technology-driven solutions across the audio-visual and media sectors. The call specifically identifies examples (but not limited) including content-production technology, immersive storytelling, streaming and monetisation, rights management and creator financing platforms. Film-related technology ventures can therefore fall within the scope of Audio-Visual Media.

Question 2.16 Would a news-tech network be eligible under the Audio-Visual Media priority area?

Potentially. A technology-driven news network or platform could be relevant where technology and innovation are central to the business model and the solution contributes to the development, distribution, monetisation or financing of media content. Eligibility would depend on the specific business model, maturity, market traction, scalability and strategic fit.

Question 2.17 Would a global platform for sustainable film financing, production and certification be eligible?

Potentially. The call specifically identifies creator financing platforms among potential Audio-Visual Media solutions. A technology-driven platform combining film financing, sustainable production and certification could therefore be relevant, provided that it meets the applicable maturity, market traction, scalability and strategic-fit requirements.

Question 2.18 Would an immersive web experience or immersive digital platform qualify?
Potentially. The Audio-Visual Media area includes innovative approaches such as immersive storytelling and technology-enabled media solutions. The technology should be central to the venture's business model and demonstrate potential for commercialisation and scaling.

Question 2.19 Does the Fashion priority area include technology-driven sustainable fashion businesses?
Yes. Fashion is one of the three priority areas covered by the call. The call highlights circular innovation, recycling and textile technologies, supply-chain innovation, circular business models and circular design. Technology-driven solutions addressing these areas can therefore be relevant.

Question 2.20 Can a venture that previously participated in an EIT Culture & Creativity programme apply to this call?
The call expressly contemplates ventures that have previously entered into an FSM agreement, including ventures already in the 100-to-Watch portfolio, participating in this call. Such ventures may be required to enter into an additional or amended FSM agreement.

Question 2.21 What are the minimum financial traction requirements for the Scale Programme, and can non-financial KPIs, such as the number of platform users, also be considered in demonstrating traction?
While non-financial KPIs can be valuable evidence of traction, particularly for platform and technology businesses, they do not replace the Scale Programme's investment/fundraising eligibility requirements. Applicants should present the combination of financial and non-financial evidence that best demonstrates the maturity, scalability, and market adoption of their venture.

Question 2.22 How is a “startup” defined for the purposes of this call, and can a company operating for more than four years with established revenues still qualify?
Company age, on its own, does not determine eligibility. A company with several years of operating history and established revenues may still qualify if it meets the eligibility requirements and can demonstrate the innovation, growth ambition, and scaling potential expected by the programme.

Question 2.23 If the applicant entity was newly incorporated, can contracts, invoices and revenue generated by the same founder for the same product under a previously registered business be submitted as evidence of market traction, or must these documents be issued in the name of the applicant entity?
Evidence generated under a previous business may be submitted as supporting evidence of market traction, provided that clear continuity with the applicant venture can be demonstrated, including a link to the same founder(s), product or solution and business activity. Such evidence must be clearly identified as relating to the previous business. The relevance and sufficiency of the evidence will be assessed based on the information provided in the application.

Question 2.24 What counts as sufficient market traction for the Shape Acceleration Programme, and does it have to involve revenue or paid engagements?

We are looking for evidence that the market is responding to what you are building. That evidence can take different forms depending on your business model, your sector, and where you are in your journey.

What we consider strong traction signals:

- Paying customers — even a small number with consistent repeat engagement
- Signed pilots or Letters of Intent from real organisations
- A growing and returning user base with measurable retention
- Revenue — even early or modest — generated through your core product, not side activities
- Strategic partnerships where a credible partner has committed time, resources, or co-development

What we do not consider sufficient on its own:

- Positive feedback from friends, family, or people you pitched to
- A large following or strong social media presence without conversion
- Interest from potential customers who have not committed to anything
- Grants or project funding that is not tied to your core product or service

Question 2.25 Can secured State aid be considered as previously raised funding for the purposes of the Scale eligibility criteria?

In general, no. The Scale eligibility criteria refer to fundraising and investment obtained from qualified investors. Public grants, State aid schemes, and other non-dilutive public funding instruments would not normally be considered equivalent to investment raised from qualified investors for the purpose of meeting the fundraising threshold. However, such funding may still be relevant as evidence of the venture's development, traction, or financial support history.

Question 2.26 Which countries are eligible for the call, and what is the difference between Horizon Europe Associated Countries and EIT RIS countries?

The Shape and Scale Programmes are open to eligible for-profit entities established in EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries. Non-RIS countries are countries that are not part of the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS). A company established in an EU Member State or Horizon Europe Associated Country, including Switzerland, can apply provided it meets all other eligibility requirements.

Question 2.27 Can a technology solution serving a particular cultural or creative sector qualify even if the company itself does not produce traditional cultural or creative products?

The key test is whether the venture is meaningfully relevant to the selected priority area.

Question 2.28 Can a company become part of the 100-to-Watch portfolio without having previously participated in an EIT Culture & Creativity programme?

At open application stage, unfortunately, no.

3. Application process

Question 3.1 How do I apply for the Shape and Scale programmes?
There is one application form to apply to both Shape and Scale Programmes. The programme that matches the maturity of your company is suggested to you based on your answers to the questions. Applications to the programmes must be submitted via the official application form until the deadline 12 October 2026.

Question 3.2 Can I apply to both Shape and Scale at the same time?
No. Applicants can only apply to one programme.

Question 3.3 What happens if I apply to the wrong programme?
Applications will be evaluated under the selected programme. If the mismatch is significant (e.g. too early for Scale), the evaluators may score the application with a lower score and it may result in the application being ranked lower on the final results list.

Question 3.4 Can Shape participants later apply to Scale?
Yes. Companies that progress significantly after completing Shape may later apply to the Scale programme in future calls.

Question 3.5 When is the application deadline?
The application deadline is 12 October 2026 at 17:00 CEST.

Question 3.6 What documents must be submitted with the application?
The call requires, among other things:

- Application form
- Pitch Deck
- Proof of company registration
- Detailed budget and EIT Culture & Creativity funding request template
- Evidence of the solution in action, such as a demo, screenshot, recording or product deck
- Latest available company financial information. Documents that best demonstrate your current business activity and traction and company financial information.
- 1 minute video (optional)

Additional documents required for Shape applicants:

- Venture Execution Plan

Additional documents required for Shape applicants:

- Venture Scaling Plan
- The supporting evidence of investor commitment or recently raised investment (last 18 months)
- Cash-flow or use-of-funds forecast

Question 3.7 Can activities start before the Subgrant Agreement is signed?

Applicants may undertake activities before signature, but they do so at their own cost and risk. EIT Culture & Creativity does not commit to providing financial support until the relevant eligibility, validation and contracting requirements have been completed and the Subgrant Agreement has been signed.

Question 3.8 Can costs incurred before the Subgrant Agreement be reimbursed?

The call does not provide for reimbursement of activities undertaken before the applicable agreement and eligibility period. Applicants should therefore not assume that pre-contracting expenditure will be eligible.

Question 3.9 Can applicants apply directly to the Scale or Shape Programme?

There is a single application. Ventures are selected into Shape or Scale according to their stage of development and investment readiness.

Question 3.10 Is pre-application support or guidance available to applicants before submitting their application?

Yes. Applicants can submit their questions through the official contact form. Info session recording is also available on call website.

Question 3.11 If an applicant applies through an existing eligible legal entity but establishes a new legal entity in another eligible country before contracting, can the Subgrant Agreement be signed with the new entity and the PIC updated accordingly, provided that the founder, team, project, intellectual property and proposed activities remain unchanged?

No. The application and subsequent award are linked to the legal entity that submitted the application and was assessed for eligibility and selection. A newly incorporated entity is considered a different legal entity and cannot simply replace the applicant by updating the PIC before contracting.

Question 3.12 Must at least one founder be formally contracted as a full-time employee, or can the full-time commitment be fulfilled through another contractual or legal arrangement?

For the Shape Programme, at least one founder must be working full time on the venture. The Call Guidelines do not require this commitment to take the form of a full-time employment contract or prescribe a specific contractual arrangement. Applicants should, however, be able to demonstrate that the founder is genuinely committed to the venture on a full-time basis and that the applicable arrangement complies with relevant national legal requirements. EIT Culture & Creativity may request supporting evidence where necessary to verify eligibility.

Question 3.13 Can sole proprietorships, partnerships, or other forms of business entities apply?

Potentially yes, but only if the entity qualifies as a legal entity under the applicable eligibility and PIC registration requirements.

Question 3.14 Can Letters of Interest from potential customers, such as art museums and galleries, be considered sufficient evidence of market traction for the Shape Acceleration Programme?

Letters of Interest can contribute to demonstrating market validation and early traction, but should ideally be complemented by pilots, user feedback, validation results, partnerships, or other indicators demonstrating that potential customers actively value and intend to use the solution.

Question 3.15 Is there a maximum amount of previous funding a startup may have received and still remain eligible for the Shape Acceleration Programme?

There is no maximum amount of previous funding specified. Applicants can choose to apply for Shape if they consider it the most suitable programme for their plans and growth roadmap.

Question 3.16 If a venture expects to generate revenue shortly after the application deadline, can it still qualify for the Shape Acceleration Programme?

Market traction can be demonstrated in various ways. While revenue is an important form of traction, applicants can also demonstrate traction through signed pilot agreements, purchase orders, and other evidence of market interest. If the venture can provide evidence demonstrating market traction, it can apply for the Shape Acceleration Programme. If it does not yet have sufficient evidence of market traction, there will be further Shape calls in the future.

Question 3.17 Can product development, customer pilots, and market validation carried out before the incorporation of a spin-off be used as evidence of the applicant's traction, provided that the relevant product, intellectual property, or commercial rights have been transferred or licensed to the new company?

Yes. A newly incorporated spin-off may rely on pre-incorporation product development, customer pilots, and market validation activities as evidence of traction, provided that the applicant clearly demonstrates legal and operational continuity between those activities and the applicant company, including ownership or rights to exploit the relevant product, technology, IP, and commercial relationships.

Question 3.18 Who is eligible to apply to the call, and what legal requirements must the applicant meet?

Under this call, applications must be submitted by a single for-profit legal entity. Individuals and natural persons are not eligible to apply.

Question 3.19 Can a company that has been operating for five years and is transitioning to an innovative SME, while developing a new product or service line, apply to the programme?

Potentially yes. The programme is not limited to newly established startups. A company that has been operating for several years may apply, provided it meets the eligibility requirements of the relevant programme and can demonstrate that it is developing and commercialising an innovative, scalable, and technology-driven product or service aligned with one of the call's priority areas.

Question 3.20 What level of commercial traction and business maturity is expected for Shape applicants?
The absence of paying customers does not automatically make an applicant ineligible for the Shape Programme. However, applicants are expected to demonstrate credible market validation and early traction and provide tangible evidence that the solution exists and is operational beyond the concept stage.

Examples of tangible evidence for commercial traction include;

- Paying customers — even a small number with consistent repeat engagement
- Signed pilots or Letters of Intent from real organisations
- A growing and returning user base with measurable retention
- Revenue — even early or modest — generated through your core product, not side activities
- Strategic partnerships where a credible partner has committed time, resources, or co-development

Question 3.21 What types of solutions are considered eligible under Audio-Visual Media?
Examples of potential solutions and their descriptions can be found in Annex VI – Examples of Potential Solutions of the Call Guidelines. If you are still unsure, use the Contact us form to confirm if your solution falls under priority area of your choice.

Question 3.22 At what stage must the requirement for at least one founder to work full time on the venture be met? How is “full time” assessed when a founder is transitioning from another company or organisation?
Full commitment to the venture at the time of application is mandatory. Applicants should therefore demonstrate, where possible, that at least one founder is fully committed to the venture when submitting the application.

Question 3.23 Can startups that previously participated in a Shape cohort, but did not receive financial support, apply for the Shape Acceleration Programme again under this call?
Yes. Startups that previously participated in a Shape cohort are eligible to apply again, including those that did not receive financial support.

Question 3.24 Are IT solutions specifically designed for the Fashion sector eligible to apply, or is eligibility limited to startups and scaleups developing physical fashion products?
Yes. Fashion tech ventures are eligible and well aligned with the objectives of the call. Applicants may offer software, AI, data, platform, marketplace, traceability, sustainability, circularity, supply-chain, or other technology-driven solutions addressing challenges in the Fashion sector. The key requirement is that the applicant develops a scalable product or technology with strong commercial growth potential.

Question 3.25 Does the company need to be registered for a minimum period before applying to the programme?
No. The call does not set a minimum company age or registration period. Applicants must be legally established by the application deadline and meet all eligibility requirements of the relevant programme.

Question 3.26 Can newly established companies apply, and must the company already be incorporated by the application deadline?

The organisation must be legally registered at the time of application, as applicants are required to have a PIC (Participant Identification Code).

Question 3.27 Can an unpaid pilot with a customer be considered as evidence of market traction under the Shape eligibility criteria?

Yes. Early traction may be demonstrated through a range of credible market-validation indicators, including pilot customers, active users, commercial pilots, partnerships, Letters of Intent (LOIs), and repeat usage.

Question 3.28 What does "early traction" mean, and is it necessary to have paying customers, or can other forms of traction, such as Letters of Support, also be considered?

Early traction may be demonstrated through a range of credible market-validation indicators, including pilot customers, active users, commercial pilots, partnerships, Letters of Intent (LOIs), and customer engagement metrics. Paying customers are therefore not the only form of evidence that may demonstrate early traction.

Question 3.29 How should companies established less than six months ago provide the required financial information, such as bank statements?

Where the applicant company has been established for less than six months, it should provide the company bank statements covering the full period available since incorporation or since the company bank account was opened. The applicant should also ensure that the company's incorporation date is clearly evidenced through the mandatory proof of registration. EIT Culture & Creativity may request additional financial information where necessary to assess the applicant's financial capacity.

Question 3.30 Would a Venture Execution Plan focused on manufacturing, deploying, and commercially validating a first market-ready unit be considered aligned with the Shape Acceleration Programme, provided that the activities are aimed at market entry, revenue generation, and subsequent replication rather than manufacturing alone?

Applicants should clearly demonstrate how the proposed activities contribute to commercial traction and growth rather than focusing solely on manufacturing or technical development.

4. Application form

Question 4.1 Is the same application platform used for Shape and Scale?

Yes. Applications for both the Shape Acceleration Programme and the Scale Post-Acceleration Programme are submitted through the same online application platform. Applicants should select the programme (Shape or Scale) they wish to apply for and complete the corresponding application form and supporting documentation requirements. As the eligibility criteria, evaluation criteria, and required annexes differ between the two programmes, applicants should carefully review the relevant guidance before submitting their application.

Based on the information provided in the application, EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the right to recommend or suggest the programme that best matches the maturity, traction, and growth stage of the applicant venture. Such a recommendation does not guarantee eligibility or selection and does not replace the applicant's responsibility to ensure that it meets the requirements of the programme for which it applies.

Question 4.2 Are the application forms different?

Yes.

- Shape applications focus more on innovation, concept validation, and early development,
- Scale applications require detailed financials, traction metrics, and investment evidence.

Question 4.3 Can I edit my application after submission?

Yes, you may save your application as a draft; however, it is essential to retain the access link, as administrators do not have access to draft applications and cannot recover them.

After submission, you will still be able to edit your application but only before the official deadline. Please ensure that you keep the access link safe, as it will be required to make any further changes.

Question 4.4 Is there technical support available?

Yes. All applicants may contact the Contact form indicated in the call documentation in the event of technical issues. In addition, two online information sessions will be organised, providing an opportunity to ask questions directly to the programme team. Applicants can register using this link..

- 27 August 2026, 11:00 CET
- 22 September 2026, 15:00 CET

Question 4.5 Do I need a PIC number to apply?

Yes. Legal entities applying for this call must register in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal to obtain a 9-digit PIC number. Check if your organization already has one here.

Question 4.6 What information about the applicant organisation is required in the application form?
The application tool requires information including the organisation's legal name, entity type, country and country code, address, PIC number, VAT number where applicable, legal entity registration number and NACE code. Please check the call guideline Annex II – Application Form for the full list

Question 4.7 What priority areas can be selected in the application form?
Applicants can select one of three priority areas:

- Architecture
- Audio-Visual Media
- Fashion

The application form is open only to solutions from these three areas.

Question 4.8 Can multiple users (e.g. co-writers or readers) collaborate on the same online application form?
Yes. You can share the link to your application draft with other team members, who can access it and contribute to the form. However, we do not recommend working on the application simultaneously.

Question 4.9 Is a downloadable proposal template available to help applicants prepare their application draft?
No separate proposal template is available. However, the application form is available in PDF format in Annex II of the Call Guidelines, which applicants can use as a reference when preparing their application draft.

5. Evaluation process

Question 5.1 Will all proposals undergo external evaluation?

No. Only proposals satisfying all the admissibility and eligibility criteria shall pass on to the award criteria assessment stage.

Question 5.2 Can I reapply if my application was rejected?

Yes, applicants may reapply in future calls if not selected.

Question 5.3 How are applications evaluated?

Applications go through several stages:

- Admissibility and eligibility checks
- External quality evaluation
- Internal portfolio selection/online interview stage
- Final ranking and selection.

Eligible proposals are independently assessed by three external expert evaluators against the applicable award criteria.

Question 5.4 What are the main evaluation criteria?

The external quality evaluation uses the Horizon Europe criteria of:

- Excellence
- Impact
- Quality and efficiency of implementation

The applicable EIT-specific criteria, including strategic fit and contribution to financial sustainability objectives, are also considered during portfolio selection.

Question 5.5 Will applicants be interviewed?

Applicants progressing to the portfolio selection stage will be invited to an online interview. The interview may include a short presentation of up to 10 minutes followed by a question-and-answer session of up to 10 minutes.

Question 5.6 Are there specific cultural and creative values or considerations that are taken into account in the evaluation of applications?

Successful applications should demonstrate both a strong business case and a meaningful contribution to the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries addressed by the call.

Question 5.7 How does EIT Culture & Creativity assess B2B technology ventures where the core product is sold together with supporting services such as onboarding, implementation, workflow design, or training?

The call does not exclude technology ventures that provide onboarding, implementation, training, or related customer-support services. Such activities are common in B2B technology businesses. The key consideration is whether the core value proposition and primary revenue driver is the product or technology itself, rather than bespoke services.

6. Budget & Financial sustainability

Question 6.1 How much financial support can be awarded?

The maximum amount depends on the support pathway:

- Up to EUR 100,000 under the Shape Acceleration Programme,
- Additional follow on support of up to EUR 100,000 for selected top performing Shape ventures after Demo Day,
- Up to EUR 200,000 under the Scale Post Acceleration Programme,
- Up to EUR 500,000 for eligible RIS based Scale ventures.

Question 6.2 Is the financial support provided as reimbursement of costs?

Financial support under this call is provided in the form actual-cost reimbursement model. Financial support will be calculated on the basis of actual eligible costs incurred, reported and accepted, up to the maximum amount awarded under the relevant Subgrant Agreement.

Question 6.3 What can the funding be used for?

Eligible expenditure covers costs that are directly related to the approved activities and contribute to the achievement of the milestones and deliverables defined under the programmes. Financial support is structured according to three predefined funding tiers:

- Personnel
- Travel and Subsistence
- Subcontracting
- Cost of other goods and services

For more detailed information please visit Annex IV – Eligibility of Expenditure in the call guideline.

Question 6.4 Can EIT Culture & Creativity suspend or recover funding?

Yes. EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the right to withhold, reduce, or recover financial support in cases of non-compliance with programme obligations, missing deliverables, or breach of contractual conditions.

Question 6.5 What is the Financial Sustainability Mechanism (FSM)?

The FSM is a contractual mechanism linked to specific funding opportunities, including follow-on support and scaling implementation support. All selected participants for both Shape and Scale programmes must sign an FSM agreement as a condition of participation and funding.

The FSM instrument applied under this call is a Call Option Agreement. Under this agreement, EIT Culture & Creativity is granted:

- The right to acquire a fixed percentage of shares at nominal value at a later stage; and
- The right to participate in future financing rounds under preferential conditions, as further specified in the agreement.

Further details regarding the applicable instruments, terms, and conditions are provided in Annex V.

Question 6.6 What is the purpose of the FSM?

The FSM ensures long-term sustainability of the EIT ecosystem by allowing reinvestment of value created. It is not a short-term financial return mechanism, but a strategic alignment tool.

Question 6.7 What level of financial support is available under Shape?

Selected ventures may receive:

- Up to EUR 100,000 in base financial support,
- Potential additional follow on support of up to EUR 100,000 for top performing ventures.

Question 6.8 What level of financial support is available under Scale?

Selected ventures may receive:

- Up to EUR 200,000 for non-RIS ventures,
- Up to EUR 500,000 for eligible RIS-based ventures.

Question 6.9 What is the objective of the additional follow on support under the Shape programme?

The additional support is intended to help top performing ventures accelerate fundraising execution, commercial growth, and scaling activities following the mid programme assessment.

Question 6.10 When will selected beneficiaries receive the first payment?

Selected beneficiaries may receive the first pre-financing payment (up to 50% for Shape participants and up to 40% for Scale participants) of the awarded funding amount at the start of the programme, following successful completion of the onboarding process, signature of the required agreements, and fulfilment of any conditions set out in the Subgrant Agreement.

Question 6.11 Can hardware, demonstrators, manufacturing activities and related subcontracting costs be funded?

Such costs may be eligible, provided they are directly linked to the approved growth or scaling activities, necessary and proportionate, incurred during the eligibility period, and included in the approved budget under an eligible cost category.

Question 6.12 Are the salaries of existing employees and founders eligible under the personnel cost category?

Yes. Existing employees and founders may be eligible under the Personnel cost category, subject to the applicable eligibility rules.

Question 6.13 Does the beneficiary have to spend the entire amount awarded?

No. The final amount is based on actual eligible costs incurred, reported and accepted, up to the maximum amount awarded. Beneficiaries are not required to demonstrate expenditure equal to the full maximum where the corresponding activities or costs were not incurred.

Question 6.14 Can the financial support be used as unrestricted seed capital?

No. The financial support is provided through an actual-cost reimbursement model. Costs must be eligible, directly related to the approved activities and supported by appropriate documentation.

Question 6.15 Can platform development, partnerships and pilot activities be included in budget?

Potentially. These activities may be included where they are directly connected to the approved Venture Plan and contribute to the programme objectives. The associated expenditure must comply with the applicable eligibility rules and budget ceilings.

Question 6.16 Can external sales coaching or training be funded?

The programme itself provides mentoring, coaching and related support. Participation in scheduled mentoring, coaching and programme activities is mandatory. External coaching or training would need to comply with the applicable eligible-cost rules and be included in the approved budget where appropriate.

Question 6.17 If a Scale applicant is currently fundraising, can the EUR 200,000 investment close after the application deadline?

The call requires a lead investor and signed term sheet(s) or equivalent formal commitment(s) of at least €200,000 for the active-fundraising route by the call deadline.

Question 6.18 Where can I find more information on eligible costs?

The financial support is based on actual eligible costs, with category-level ceilings. Examples and description of cost categories can be found in call guidelines Annex IV - Eligibility of Expenditure and in Budget template Instruction tab.

Question 6.19 Does an investment from an industrial or corporate investor qualify?

Potentially. The call recognises qualified investors including venture capital funds, corporate venture capital investors, credible angel investors and equivalent investment actors. The investment must also satisfy the applicable amount and timing requirements.

Question 6.20 What happens to the 3% Call Option if the company never completes an EUR 500,000 Financing Round?

The Option Agreement defines an EUR 500,000 Financing Round as a qualifying financing event and links the option period to the consummation of the next qualifying Financing Round. The agreement also states that the option is not conditional upon a Financing Round taking place. Applicants should refer to the final executed Option Agreement for the legally binding terms concerning the duration and exercise of the option.

Question 6.21 Is signing the Call Option Agreement (COA) mandatory for this call?

Yes. Signing the COA alongside your Financial Support Agreement (FSA) is a standard requirement for all companies selected under this call.

Why we require this: As an EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC), EIT Culture & Creativity is required to implement financial sustainability mechanisms that support the long-term sustainability of its programmes and ecosystem. The COA is the mechanism used under this call.

Rather than requiring grant repayments or charging participation fees, the COA allows EIT Culture & Creativity to participate in a limited way in the future value created by supported ventures. The intention is simple: if a venture succeeds, a modest share of that success may flow back into EIT Culture & Creativity for supporting future founders, startups, and scaleups.

Question 6.22 How does the 3% Call Option under the Financial Sustainability Mechanism work?

Selected ventures are required to sign the Financial Sustainability Mechanism (Call Option Agreement). The agreement provides EIT Culture & Creativity with a call option relating to 3% of the company's fully diluted shares, subject to the terms of the Option Agreement. Signing the agreement is a mandatory condition for participation.

Question 6.23 What exactly can EIT CC get if it exercises the option?

Under Clause 2.1, EIT CC can require the Company/Shareholders to either (a) issue brand new shares to EIT CC (dilutive to everyone), or (b) transfer existing shares from the Shareholders to EIT CC (dilutive only to whichever shareholders give up shares) — the choice of which method is used belongs to the Shareholders, not EIT CC. The number of shares equals a fixed percentage of the Company's fully diluted share capital.

Question 6.24 How much does EIT CC actually pay for these shares?

The "Option Price" is the nominal value (par value) of the shares — not fair market value, not a negotiated price. In most jurisdictions nominal value is a token amount (e.g., €1 or less per share, sometimes fractions of a cent). This is the central mechanic of the whole Agreement: EIT CC is not "buying in" like an investor: it is receiving a pre-agreed percentage of equity as consideration tied to the programme support you already received.

Question 6.25 Can the percentage change after signing — could EIT CC end up with more than the agreed number?

No — the Agreement fixes the option at a defined percentage (e.g., 3% for this particular call) of fully diluted shares, tested either at the time of exercise, or, if exercised in connection with the Relevant Financing

Round, immediately before that round. It does not grow over time. However, because it's measured as a percentage (not a fixed number of shares), the actual number of shares EIT CC receives depends on your cap table size at that moment — more shares outstanding at exercise means more Option Shares issued/transferred, but the *percentage* stays the same.

Question 6.26 How should applicants estimate travel expenses if the locations of programme activities have not yet been confirmed?

Applicants should use an average EU travel cost as a reference when estimating travel expenses in the budget.

Question 6.27 Does the Company have to pay VAT or other charges tied to this?

Clause 2.3 states any VAT payable by the Company under the Agreement will be invoiced by EIT CC and paid in cash by the Company. This depends on each jurisdiction and should be checked with your legal and tax advisors.

Question 6.28 When can EIT CC exercise this option — is there a deadline?

Clause 3.1 defines the "Option Period" as running from the Signing Date until the "Relevant Financing Round" — i.e., your next qualifying Financing Round after signing. EIT CC can exercise at any point during that window, and — importantly — the clause explicitly states exercise is not conditional on, or linked to, a Financing Round actually happening. EIT CC can exercise at any time in that window even if no round is imminent.

Question 6.29 Can we refuse or negotiate once EIT CC exercises the option?

No. The grant of the option in Clause 2.1 is described as "irrevocable," and the Company/Shareholders "undertake" (i.e., bindingly promise) to implement it. There is no discretion to refuse once a valid Exercise Notice is delivered within the Option Period — your only real choice retained is *how* to implement it (new-share issuance vs. transfer of existing shares — Clause 4.1), not *whether* to implement it.

Question 6.30 What happens if we bring on new shareholders later — do they need to know about this option?

Yes — Clause 4.3 obligates the Company and Shareholders to ensure that any new shareholders (including new investors) accede to this Agreement before or when they acquire their stake. Practically, this means every future investor round needs to build in this accession step, and every new investor will become aware of, and contractually bound by, EIT CC's option.

Question 6.31 Does EIT CC's stake shrink when we raise more money later, like everyone else's?

Only up to the point EIT CC becomes a shareholder — but once EIT CC (or its Affiliate) has become a shareholder, Clause 5.1 gives it an ongoing anti-dilution subscription right: whenever the Company issues new shares in the future, EIT CC can subscribe for enough new shares to maintain its existing percentage, on the same price/terms as the round's lead investor. This is an option for EIT CC and will be decided on a case by case basis.

Question 6.32 Does the anti-dilution subscription rights mean EIT CC gets free shares?
No — this anti-dilution right requires EIT CC to actually pay the same price per share as the lead investor in that future round (unlike the original Call Option, which is at nominal value). So future top-ups in shares aren't free, but EIT CC does get the *option* to keep pace with new rounds without being diluted, which ordinary investors don't usually get unless they specifically negotiate pro-rata rights.

Question 6.33 What law governs this Agreement, and where would disputes be resolved?
Clause 10.6 states German law governs, with exclusive jurisdiction in the courts of Cologne — regardless of where your company is actually incorporated or operates.

Question 6.34 What would the 3% option actually look like on my cap table?
Say at the time EIT CC exercises, your fully diluted share count (including all issued shares, your ESOP pool, and any outstanding convertibles/warrants counted as converted) is 10,000,000 shares. 3% of that fully diluted number is 300,000 shares. The Company/Shareholders would need to either issue 300,000 new shares to EIT CC, or transfer 300,000 existing shares from the Shareholders, so that EIT CC ends up holding 300,000 out of what becomes 10,300,000 shares (if new shares are issued) or 300,000 out of the original 10,000,000 (if existing shares are transferred, with no new shares created).

Question 6.35 What if EIT CC never exercises the option at all?
Then nothing happens — no shares are ever issued or transferred, no cash changes hands, and your cap table is unaffected. The option is a contingent right sitting in the background; it only has an effect if and when EIT CC actively delivers an Exercise Notice.

Question 6.36 Could exercising the option ever require Company funds we don't have?
Because the Option Price is only nominal value, the Company's direct cash cost of the option itself is minimal. However, Clause 10.5 requires the Company to bear taxes, registration fees, legal fees, stamp duty, and (if applicable) notarization costs of implementing the option — these are real out-of-pocket costs that could matter for a cash-strapped early-stage company, especially if your jurisdiction requires notarized capital increases (common in certain jurisdictions, for example).

Question 6.37 If we do a down round later, does that affect EIT CC's stake?
The original option size (fixed at signing/exercise as a percentage) isn't valuation-dependent, so a down round wouldn't retroactively change the number of Option Shares already issued/transferred to EIT CC. If EIT CC exercises its ongoing Clause 5 anti-dilution right in a down round, it would subscribe at the same (lower) price per share as the round's lead investor, like any other participating existing shareholder.

Question 6.38 Does exercising the option require shareholder approval, or can the Shareholders bind the Company unilaterally by signing this Agreement?
Clause 4.2 requires the Company and Shareholders to "pass all shareholder resolutions and take all actions required" to implement the option at the time of exercise — meaning formal corporate approvals (e.g., a shareholders' resolution approving a capital increase) still need to happen at implementation, even though you're contractually promising *in advance*, by signing this Agreement, to ensure those approvals happen.

If your jurisdiction requires supermajority or unanimous shareholder votes for a capital increase, signing this Agreement is effectively pre-committing your vote.

Question 6.39 Does the 3% Call Option apply to the applicant company as a whole, or only to the specific venture or project supported through the programme?

The Call Option Agreement applies to the legal entity signing the Financial Support Agreement and FSM documentation, not to an individual project, product line, or business unit. The 3% Call Option therefore relates to the applicant's company as a whole and is calculated on the fully diluted share capital of that legal entity, in accordance with the terms of the Option Agreement.

Question 6.40 How does the new 3% Call Option Agreement interact with an existing EIT Culture & Creativity financial instrument for companies already included in the 100-to-Watch portfolio?

All selected startups, including 100-to-Watch companies, are required to enter into the new FSM. The new 3% Call Option is therefore additional to any other agreement that may have been signed in the past.

Question 6.41 If a Shape company receives the initial EUR 100,000 and is subsequently awarded an additional EUR 100,000 at Demo Day, does the same 3% Call Option apply to the total EUR 200,000, or does the additional funding trigger a separate FSM or equity obligation?

For this call, participation in the Shape Programme requires the execution of the FSM Call Option Agreement. The additional follow-on support available after Demo Day does not automatically trigger a second Call Option Agreement.

Question 6.42 If a venture receives funding under both the Shape Acceleration Programme and subsequent additional support, does the 3% Call Option apply separately to each award, or only once to the company?

This will depend on the FSM requirements of future calls. For this particular call, all selected startups are required to sign this 3% Call Option Agreement.

Question 6.43 How does the Financial Sustainability Mechanism (FSM) apply to companies already included in the 100-to-Watch portfolio, and how does it interact with any existing Virtual Share Agreement (VSA)?

All selected startups, including 100-to-Watch companies, are required to sign the new FSM agreement. This will be additional to any existing FSM agreement that has already been signed.

Question 6.44 Does the 3% Call Option apply to both the Shape Acceleration Programme and the Scale Post-Acceleration Programme?

Yes. The same FSM Call Option Agreement applies to both the Shape and Scale programmes.

Question 6.45 Do the investment terms, including the 3% Call Option, apply equally to companies applying under the 100-to-Watch Scale track, and is the 3% calculated on a pre-money or post-money basis?

Yes. All selected startups, including 100-to-Watch companies, are required to enter into the new FSM. The 3% Call Option is therefore applicable to 100-to-Watch companies and is additional to any other agreement that may have been signed in the past.

Question 6.46 How does the Shape actual-cost reimbursement model work in practice, and do applicants need to finance eligible expenditures themselves before receiving the programme's pre-financing payments?
For Shape, pre-financing of up to 50% is provided at project start and up to 30% at Month 6. The grant follows an actual-cost reimbursement model, meaning that final funding is ultimately based on eligible costs incurred and accepted. However, the pre-financing mechanism is intended to support project implementation and reduce the need for beneficiaries to finance all activities upfront.

Question 6.47 Which legal entity will be subject to the 3% Call Option and included in the equity structure/cap table?
EIT Culture & Creativity itself does not directly join cap table at the time the grant is awarded.

https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/what-we-do/business-creation/100-to-watch?utm_source=chatgpt.com

7. Other

Question 7.1 What are the key programme obligations for selected ventures?
Selected ventures are expected to:

- Participate actively in programme activities,
- Attend mandatory events and coaching sessions,
- Submit milestone deliverables on time,
- Demonstrate progress against agreed execution or scaling plans.

Question 7.2 What is the duration of the programmes?
Each cohort runs for one calendar year.

Question 7.3 Which programme activities are included?
The programme includes:

- Dedicated coaching and mentoring,
- Upskilling activities,
- Investor readiness support,

- Peer learning opportunities,
- Access to investor and corporate networks,
- Visibility and ecosystem engagement activities,
- In-person Kick off and Demo Day events.

Question 7.4 Is participation in programme activities mandatory?

Yes. Participation in mandatory programme activities is a contractual obligation linked to the release of financial support instalments.

Minimum requirements:

- **Events**: At least 1 C-level representative must attend in person,
- **Coaching sessions**: 80% attendance required,
- **Upskilling sessions**: Minimum 3 sessions attended.

Question 7.5 What happens after the programme ends?

Ventures remain connected to the EIT Culture and Creativity ecosystem and may join the 100-to-Watch portfolio, access follow-on funding opportunities, and continue engaging with investors and partners.

Question 7.6 What is the 100 to Watch portfolio?

The 100 to Watch portfolio is EIT Culture & Creativity's curated community of high potential creative tech ventures. Portfolio ventures benefit from increased visibility, ecosystem access, investor exposure, and continued engagement opportunities beyond the programme duration.

Question 7.7 How do ventures join the 100-to-Watch portfolio?

Ventures that sign a Financial Sustainability Mechanism (FSM) agreement become part of the 100-to-Watch portfolio.

Question 7.8 Are there reserved funding slots for 100-to-Watch ventures?

Yes. EIT Culture & Creativity reserves up to 2 funding slots per cohort (EUR 200,000 each) for 100-to-Watch ventures in the Scale programme**.**

Question 7.9 When will applicants be informed of the results?

The indicative timeline foresees communication of results in mid-December 2026. A 30-calendar-day standstill period follows the communication of results. Publication of results is expected in mid-January 2027, with Subgrant Agreements expected to be signed in January 2027, subject to completion of the required procedures.

Question 7.10 Will the presentation and recording of the information session be made available?

Information-session materials and recordings will be made available through the EIT Culture & Creativity website. Applicants should check the call webpage for the latest materials and FAQ updates.

Question 7.11 What is the expected acceptance rate for the Shape and Scale programmes?

- Shape Accelerator: Up to 30 startups
- Scale (from Non-RIS Country): up to 14 scaleups
- Scale (from a RIS-Country): up to 4 scaleups
- Scale 100-To-Watch: up to 2 scaleups

Question 7.12 Are there any restrictions on participating in other programmes or receiving other grants during 2027?

Participation in other programmes or receipt of other grants does not automatically affect eligibility under this call, provided there is no double funding of the same costs and all contractual obligations can be fulfilled.

Question 7.13 Does the programme provide sales coaching or training, and can related activities be covered by the financial support?

The programme includes structured coaching, mentoring, expert guidance, and growth-focused activities. In addition, the financial support may be used for business development, team expansion, marketing and commercial tools, participation in industry events, and other activities directly supporting commercial growth and scaling, subject to the approved implementation plan, budget, and applicable eligibility rules.