EIT Culture & Creativity

Co-funded by the European Union

Open call for New Ventures in Creative Tech (Spark)

Call reference number:

26-BCR-INC-014-X

EIT Culture & Creativity

Cologne| 6/10/2026

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

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Document History

Version 1.0 (2026)

Changelog

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	6/10/2026	Initial version

Abbreviations

EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
EIT KPIs	Set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) defined by the EIT that reflect the EIT operational objectives for education, entrepreneurship, and innovation. These KPIs are used to measure how effectively a KIC/project meets the objectives of the EIT.
EIT SIA	EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda
HE MGA	Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement
KAVA	KIC-added value activity
KIC	Knowledge and Innovation Community
KIC SA	KIC Strategic Agenda
NEB	New European Bauhaus
PA	Partnership Agreement
PMO	Project Management Office
RIS	Regional Innovation Scheme
BP	Business Plan
FSTP	Financial support to third parties
GEDI	Gender equality, diversity and inclusion

Definitions

Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries	Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) are based on cultural values, creativity, skills, and talent with the potential to generate innovation, wealth, and jobs through social and economic value creation, particularly from intellectual property. Sectors include architecture, archives, artistic crafts, audio-visual (film, TV, software, video games, multimedia, recorded music), cultural heritage, design, high-end industries and fashion, festivals, live music, performing arts, publishing, radio, visual arts, and advertising. (Source: European Parliament (2016/2072(INI)).
Deliverable	Deliverables are tangible or intangible goods or service produced during the project implementation phase. They track the progress made towards a project's objectives and may take the form of a report, document, software product, course, event or any other building block of a project. The deliverables specified need to fully demonstrate the project's achievements and the judicious use of public funds.
EIT	The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is an EU body established in 2008 to strengthen Europe's innovation capacity. It is part of Horizon Europe, the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and funds EIT Culture & Creativity (www.eit.europa.eu).
EIT KPI	The set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) defined by the EIT that reflect the EIT operational objectives for education, entrepreneurship, and innovation. These KPIs are used to measure how effectively a KIC/project meets the objectives of the EIT.
EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS)	The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS), launched in 2014, helps innovators from eligible countries access EIT activities, creates links among regional innovation actors, and offers tailor-made programmes to support moderate and emerging innovating countries, as well as the EU's Outermost Regions, in building their innovation capacity. List of eligible countries: https://www.eit.europa.eu/activities/eit-regional-innovation-scheme-ris-closing-innovation-divide-europe
Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement	The Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA) sets out the rights and obligations and the terms and conditions applicable to the implementation of the EIT grant.
Knowledge Triangle Integration	The EIT is established to complement existing Union and national policies and initiatives by fostering the integration of the knowledge triangle – higher education, research and innovation, and business creation – across the Union.
Standstill period	A mandatory waiting period following the communication of award decisions, during which no contracts are signed and applicants are not permitted to

	publicly announce the outcome – even if they have already received written notification. It gives unsuccessful applicants the opportunity to submit an appeal before any funding agreements are finalised.
Spark	Spark refers to the Spark Incubation Programme, a 9-month online incubation journey supporting early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs in transforming validated business concepts into formally established, investment-ready ventures. The programme combines structured training, mentorship, business model development, company formation support, and access to the EIT Culture & Creativity ecosystem.
Startup Sprints	Startup Sprints are short, high-intensity, 2–3-day bootcamps designed to help early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs validate the problem they aim to solve. Through hands-on workshops, expert feedback, rapid prototyping, field research, and pitch sessions, participants test the relevance and potential of their business ideas.

Overview of key information on the call

Call reference number	26-BCR-INC-014-X
Purpose of the call	Support in turning business ideas into new ventures.
Call opening and deadline for applications	**Call publication / opening:** 6/10/2026 **Deadline for applications:** 16/11/2026
Evaluation and implementation timeline (indicative)	• Eligibility and admissibility check: form 17 November 2026 • Evaluation of proposals: November 2026 - January 2027 • Communication of results to applicants: Beginning of February 2027 • Standstill period: 30 calendar days, counted from the day after dispatch of the communication of results • Publication of results: March 2027 • Signature of the initial Subgrant Agreement: March 2027 (subject to expiry of the applicable standstill period and completion of the required contracting checks) • Tentative start and end date of the cohort: March 2027 – December 2027
Maximum EIT funding allocated to this call	The maximum EIT funding allocated to this call is up to **EUR 1,050,000**. If the allocated budget for the first cohort is not fully utilised, the remaining funds will be carried over and allocated to the following cohort. Selected applicants under each cohort will participate into a Startup Sprint and the Spark Incubation Programme, receiving funding up to EUR 30,000 for each project selected.
Co-funding	No co-funding is expected for this call.
Focus Areas	This call is focusing on Materials & Built Environment (Fashion & Architecture). Future cohorts will expand to additional sectors, with details to be announced at a later date.
Who can apply	Early-stage founders (individuals or multidisciplinary teams) complying with the following requirements: • No registered company with the business concept applying with; • Ready to turn business concepts into scalable, for-profit ventures; • Operating in the focus industries in CCSI included in this call; • Registered in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe–associated country; • Already testing, building, or validating the business concept (not just ideating); • Developing a tech-centric solution (material innovation, hardware, or digital solution)

	Note: participants selected for the Spark Incubation Programme are expected to incorporate a new legal entity no later than Month 3 in order to continue participating in the programme and receiving financial support beyond Month 3.
List of call documents	• Call guidelines (this document) • Application form as available on the submission platform • Part B of the online application form (Annex III) • Budget plan and EIT funding request template • Declaration of Honour template (to be signed by selected applicants during signature of the initial Subgrant Agreement) • EIT Culture & Creativity Guidelines for Project Monitoring and Controlling • Eligibility of expenditures (Annex V) • Venture Execution Plan, including planned activities, milestones, deliverables and a simplified use-of-funds overview for the maximum financial support of up to EUR 30,000 under the actual-cost model • Subgrant agreement template • Lean Startup Canvas (can be seen in Annex VI) • List of countries eligible under this call: Only EU Member States and countries officially associated to Horizon Europe are eligible for funding. For reference, see paragraph **"Third countries associated to Horizon Europe"** in the List of participating countries in Horizon Europe. Please note: The **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is situated in Pillar III**. Countries eligible for funding under this call must be associated to Pillar III.
List of reference documents (with links)	• EIT Culture & Creativity Strategic Agenda 2021-2027 • KIC Code of Conduct • Rules governing appeal procedures by the KIC (see Annex 1) • EIT Impact Framework (2022-2027) with codes.pdf • Eligibility of expenditures • Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement (HE MGA) • EU Financial Regulation (Article 61) • Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union • Ethics: Self-assessment
List of documents to be submitted	• Application form as available on the submission platform, together with Part B of the online application form (Annex III) • EIT Culture & Creativity Budget template

	• Venture Execution Plan, including planned activities, milestones, deliverables and a simplified use-of-funds overview for the maximum financial support of up to EUR 30,000 under the actual-cost model
	• Complete Lean Startup Canvas (Annex VI)
	• At least one form of tangible evidence of the applicant's business idea, such as:
	  ○ Product demo (max 3 minutes)
	  ○ Screenshots of prototype or MVP
	  ○ Link to a working demo
	  ○ Pilot documentation
	  ○ Technical mock-ups or UX flows

Link to the PIC registration and submission portal	Applicants selected for the Spark Incubation Programme are required to incorporate a new legal entity by Month 3. Following incorporation, the newly established company must register in the EU Funding & tender opportunities portal, obtain a PIC and successfully complete legal entity validation through the EIT Community Onboarding Service. Following successful incorporation and legal entity validation, the contractual relationship will transition from the originally selected individual or team representative to the newly incorporated company through a second Subgrant Agreement or, where legally appropriate, an amendment or novation of the initial Subgrant Agreement. From the effective date of this transition, the newly incorporated company will become the recipient of the remaining financial support and will assume responsibility for the continued implementation and reporting of the project. This transition does not constitute a new selection or award. The newly incorporated company must implement the same selected venture, the originally selected applicant(s) must retain at least 50% combined ownership and effective control, and the core venture scope and implementation plan must remain substantially consistent with the approved application.
KPIs to be addressed	The activities delivered under this call are expected to contribute to the achievement of EIT Culture & Creativity's Business Creation KPIs, notably: • EITHE03.1 – Number of startups and scale-ups supported by the KIC for at least two months in the reporting year • EITHE04.1 – Number of startups established in the reporting year • EITHE06.1 – Total euro amount of private and public capital attracted within year N by supported startups and scale-ups Formal KPI ownership, consolidation and reporting to the EIT remain the responsibility of EIT Culture & Creativity. EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the

	right to ask for evidence and documentation from selected applicants for reporting purposes.
Contact point Q&A	Applicants may submit their inquiries via the official EIT Culture & Creativity Contact Form. This form can be used for all questions related to call content, technical aspects, thematic focus, administrative, financial, or procedural matters. The relevant team will review and respond accordingly to provide clear and aligned guidance throughout the application process. The Q&A containing all questions (in an anonymised form) made by the applicants within the submission period will be uploaded as FAQs on the website after the first info session. Applicants are encouraged to check the call webpage regularly for updates
Further information to interested applicants	Interested applicants are invited to attend an online information session related to this call on: • 20 October 2026 10:00 CET (Berlin time) • 10 November 2026 10:00 CET (Berlin time) Registration is required through the following form: Registration form The Teams meeting link will be shared with registered participants after registration. This information sessions will focus on the call content, topics, and requirements, and on general procedures, such as the submission and evaluation process. The information sessions will be recorded and made available on the EIT Culture & Creativity website. Applicants are encouraged to check the call webpage regularly for updates.

1. Introduction

1.1 Information on the EIT

European Institute of Innovation and Technology

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is a **European Union body** with a legal personality and a wide legal capacity accorded to legal persons under national law. The EIT was created in 2008 by the European Union (EU) to enhance Europe's global competitiveness by fostering collaboration between businesses, research institutions, and higher education organizations.

The EIT is governed by Regulation (EU) 2021/695 (EIT Regulation), which aligns the EIT's mission with the EU's priorities and the objectives of Horizon Europe on evolving research, innovation, economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness, sustainable growth, higher education and entrepreneurship, by means of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), which address specific societal challenges and are established and supported by the EIT.

The EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda (SIA) 2021-2027 is aligned with Horizon Europe and lays down the priority fields and the strategy of the EIT for future initiatives, capacity to generate the best innovation added-value, objectives, key actions, mode of operation, expected results, impact, as well as an estimate of the resources needed for the duration of Horizon Europe.

Horizon Europe Regulation

The Horizon Europe Regulation (EU) 2021/695 foresees that the EIT takes part in the implementation of the Horizon Europe Programme in accordance with its strategic objectives for the period 2021 to 2027, as laid down in the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the EIT, and taking into account the strategic planning of Horizon Europe.

EIT and Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) relations

The EIT Regulation defines KICs as large-scale Institutionalised European Partnerships of higher education institutions, research organisations, companies and other stakeholders in the innovation process in the form of a strategic network, regardless of its legal form, based on joint mid- to long-term innovation planning to meet the EIT's challenges and contribute to attaining the objectives established.

According to the EIT Regulation, and without prejudice to the partnership agreements and grant agreements between the EIT and each KIC, the KICs have substantial autonomy to establish their internal organisation and composition, as well as their agenda and working methods, provided that they result in progress towards achieving the objectives of the EIT and the KICs, taking into account the strategic planning of Horizon Europe and the strategic direction of the EIT set out in the SIA and by the Governing Board.

Contractual framework between the EIT and the KICs

The long-term relations between the EIT and each KIC are based on a **seven-year Partnership Agreement** (PA)[1] laying down the general terms and conditions under which the KIC operates as an Institutionalised European Partnership. Subject to positive performance, interim review and outcome of comprehensive assessment of the KIC, the PA can be extended for another period of a maximum of seven years.

The Partnership Agreement between the EIT and EIT Culture & Creativity entered into force on 1 January 2024 (PA reference: PA2024/EIT/EIT CC).

The **Grant Agreement** (GA)[2] is the contractual instrument laying down the provisions concerning the implementation of the KIC activities (KIC Business Plan, Cross-KIC activities, etc.) through grants, on an annual or multi-annual basis of up to three years with the KICs. Business plans describe the main objectives and expected results and actions taken by the KICs.

The Grant Agreement between the EIT and EIT Culture & Creativity for the 2026-2028 period entered into force on 6 May 2026 (Grant Agreement No. 101264271).

Contractual framework between the KIC and the subgrantees

In line with Annex 5 of the Grant Agreement, selected applicants will be offered Subgrant Agreement governing the implementation of the awarded projects or prizes.

1.2 Information on EIT Culture & Creativity

As the ninth Knowledge & Innovation Community (KIC), EIT Culture & Creativity aims to fundamentally change the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) across Europe. Our mission is to nurture and empower a sustainable innovation ecosystem, bringing together education, research, business, and public organisations to address sector-specific societal and economic challenges. By fostering interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration, EIT Culture & Creativity seeks to unlock the innovative potential of the fragmented CCSI, contributing significantly to Europe's green, digital, and social transitions.

EIT Culture & Creativity focuses on five priority areas: Fashion, Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Audio-Visual Media, and Gaming. These sectors face unique challenges and collectively represent a substantial portion of the EU CCSI workforce and revenue. By strategically emphasising these areas while also welcoming participants from the broader spectrum of CCSI, we aim to create and maintain jobs, increase resilience, and accelerate sustainable and responsible economic growth.

Our Strategic Agenda 2024-2027 outlines our approach to transforming the CCSI, aiming for competitiveness, resilience, and sustainable economic growth. With 60 partners from 20 countries, EIT Culture & Creativity represents Europe’s first knowledge and innovation community for the CCSI. This unique pan-European and cross-sectorial community is inclusive and open to all players, leveraging diversity as a strategy to enhance innovation and competitiveness globally.

[1] Model Partnership Agreement: Partnership Agreement
[2] Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement: general-mga_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

1.2.1 VISION AND MISSION

EIT Culture & Creativity is the institutional partnership dedicated to strengthening the European Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI), enabling them to become more sustainable, resilient, and globally competitive.

Launched in 2023 by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union, we provide access to funding, knowledge, and tailored support. As part of Europe's largest innovation ecosystem, we connect research, industry, academia, and cultural institutions to drive systemic innovation.

Our initial focus spans five key sectors: architecture, gaming, fashion, cultural heritage, and audio-visual and media. Across these domains, we support innovators end-to-end—from idea to market—scaling solutions, translating innovation into impact, and redefining entrepreneurship in the CCSI.

We are active in over 30 countries, with headquarters in Cologne and Regional Hubs in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bologna, Helsinki, Košice, and Vienna. Together, we are building a pan-European ecosystem that transcends silos, sectors, and geographies.

We believe that culture and creativity are not luxuries, but critical infrastructure for resilience, renewal, and sustainable economic growth. Whether you are an innovator, company, university, research centre, cultural institution, investor, policymaker, civic leader, or learner, we invite you to join us in shaping desirable futures for Europe.

Vision

To position the CCSI as a central driver of Europe's economic, societal, and environmental transformation.

Mission

To drive sustainable and responsible growth within and beyond the CCSI through innovation, education, business creation, and societal transformation.

Impact goals

Working towards this mission, EIT Culture & Creativity will pursue three overarching impact goals for the EU CCSI:

- Create and safeguard jobs in a resilient European CCSI ecosystem that can scale, innovate, and compete in global markets.
- Strengthen resilience within and through the EU CCSI by reducing environmental impact, supporting inclusive growth, and increasing social cohesion.
- Accelerate the transition towards sustainable, responsible, and competitive economic growth across the EU CCSI

Challenges

EIT Culture & Creativity has identified three core challenges limiting the ability of the EU Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI) to remain globally competitive, resilient, and impactful:

- **Skills gaps for future job markets** – insufficient alignment between education, training, and the rapidly evolving needs of the CCSI workforce.
- **Limited innovation implementation capacity** – strong creative potential exists, but it is not consistently translated into scalable, market-ready solutions.
- **Weak venture creation, scaling, and value capture** – insufficient support for building and growing companies, coupled with underdeveloped monetisation of intellectual property and revenue generation

1.2.2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

To achieve our mission, EIT Culture & Creativity will focus on the following strategic objectives (SOs):

- Future-proofing CCSI students: Equip CCSI students with entrepreneurial and cross-disciplinary skills necessary for the green and digital transitions. This includes addressing emerging technologies, environmental challenges, market disruptions, globalisation, and talent shortages. Please note that this call has early-stage founders as the main general target group.
- Deploying and scaling CCSI innovations: Support collaborative innovations that have significant commercial potential and societal benefits, focusing on green and digital technologies and new business models.
- Accelerating and scaling CCSI market opportunities: Provide business support to create and scale ventures, enabling them to compete globally and access necessary capital, markets, and audiences.

These strategic objectives are designed to create and maintain jobs, enhance resilience, and accelerate sustainable economic growth within the EU's CCSI.

This graphic illustrates the relationship between our challenges, strategic objectives, and impact goals, highlighting how each proposal can contribute to the overarching mission and vision of EIT Culture & Creativity.

1.2.3 PRIORITY AREAS

EIT Culture & Creativity's Strategic Agenda 2024-2027 covers five priority areas – Architecture, Audio-Visual Media, Cultural Heritage, Fashion, and Gaming – all of which are described in the table below. Each represents a significant share of the EU CCSI workforce and revenue and faces unique challenges requiring targeted intervention. In line with the Business Plan 2026-2028, the 2026 calls concentrate their funding scope on three of these areas: Architecture, Audio-Visual Media, and Fashion. Cultural Heritage and Gaming remain strategic priorities of EIT Culture & Creativity and are included here for full context; they are planned for expanded call coverage from 2027 onwards as set out in the Business Plan.

Priority area	Objective	Key challenges (non-exhaustive list)
Architecture	• Foster circular innovation with a social dimension, focusing on new bio-based materials and technologies. • Affordable climate adaptation, enhancing	• Growing demand for reusing and renovating existing buildings over new constructions. • Limited entrepreneurial skills among architects and lack of capacity to use architecture to promote social cohesion.

Priority area	Objective	Key challenges (non-exhaustive list)
	liveability and cohesion in urban environments.	• SMEs and freelancers in architecture struggle to scale and find appropriate economic models.
Audio-Visual Media	• Promote responsible and trustworthy use of technology, including generative AI, audience data collection.	• Limited capacity to implement and commercialise new technologies. • New business models based on disruptive technologies. • Issues with data ownership and privacy. • Stagnant revenues and limited investment capabilities.
Cultural Heritage	• Integrate emerging technologies and new business models for commercialising scalable products and services. • Preserve cultural heritage, increase societal impact towards social cohesion.	• Disappearing traditional knowledge and craft skills. • Limited skills for emerging technologies and entrepreneurship. • Financial bottlenecks making it difficult to monetise and find new revenue streams from cultural heritage.
Fashion	• Drive circular innovations, new textile processing, recycling technologies, and supply chain innovations. • Promote circular business models and circular design.	• High reliance on raw material consumption and environmentally damaging production processes. • Significant waste generation leading to environmental degradation and social issues. • SMEs and new ventures face difficulty competing with global industry players and scaling up.
Gaming	• Foster innovation with disruptive technologies focused on digital ethics and cross-sectoral collaboration. • Enhance the societal impact of the gaming sector.	• Access to funding • Access to talent and strict industry-specific curricula. • Barriers from global platforms restricting market access and choice of distribution channels. • Difficulty for EU gaming companies to maintain and grow market share against dominant American and Asian players.

1.2.4 MISSION OF THE PROGRAMMATIC PILLARS

Education

The Education area equips learners with the skills and entrepreneurial mindsets needed to lead the green, digital and social transitions. By integrating creativity, technology, sustainability and business expertise, it fosters cross-disciplinary innovation across and beyond Europe's Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI). Through practice-based learning, industry collaboration and forward-looking curricula, Education strengthens capacity for inclusive, responsible and future-oriented growth.

Innovation

The Innovation area bridges groundbreaking ideas and commercial viability through a structured, impact-driven pipeline. It advances high-potential, close-to-market projects (TRL 7–9) from validation to deployment and commercialisation through rigorous selection, milestone-based funding, and robust business models — accelerating their path to scalable impact.

By mobilising cross-sector expertise and strategic investment, Innovation strengthens Europe's cultural ecosystems and enhances global competitiveness. It delivers measurable economic, societal, and financial impact for the CCSI by connecting projects to international markets, investors, and EIT business creation pathways — ensuring long-term growth and value creation.

Business Creation

The Business Creation area supports entrepreneurs and ventures in building, scaling, and internationalising sustainable, competitive businesses, while unlocking access to public and private finance.

Through incubation, acceleration, and post-acceleration support, it guides companies from product development and IP strategy to market entry and expansion. With a strong focus on robust business models, investor readiness, and global positioning, Business Creation ensures that creative innovation translates into scalable ventures — driving economic resilience, long-term value creation, and measurable impact across Europe.

Transformation & the New European Bauhaus (NEB)

The Transformation & NEB area drives systemic change through cultural practices and creative approaches (artistic and design methodologies), with a focus on priority areas including sustainable fashion and textiles, design, architecture, and the transformation of the lived environment. It explores new models of collaboration, governance and societal engagement, turning experimental ideas into practical, scalable initiatives. Rooted in inclusion, sustainability and shared responsibility, Transformation strengthens social cohesion and resilience, fostering place-based innovation and shaping a more sustainable, beautiful and inclusive European future.

2. Description of the subject matter of the call

2.1 Open call for New Ventures in Creative Tech

The Open call for New Ventures in Creative Tech supports aspiring founders and teams in transforming promising concepts into new legally established businesses through financial support of up to EUR 30,000 and a venture creation pathway.

Selected applicants will participate in a two-stage venture development journey:

- **Startup Sprint**: a short, intensive programme focused on validating the business model, refining the value proposition, market testing and preparing teams for market entry.
- **Spark Incubation Programme:** a structured incubation phase supporting company formation, product-market fit, and early traction, including access to mentorship, networks, and potential funding opportunities.

This staged approach ensures that the selected participants progress with the right tools and mindset, including a validated problem-solution fit to be able to utilise the programme most efficiently.

2.1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS CALL

The purpose of this call is to identify, select, and support aspiring founders and teams to benefit from financial support of up to EUR 30,000 and participate in a structured **venture creation pathway** to develop new, legally established businesses.

The programme targets individuals and teams working on early-stage business concepts who have not yet registered a company. Legal entities are not eligible.

2.1.2 SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES UNDER THIS CALL

The support provided to applicants to build their company is designed around three complementary activities (Venture Funding, Startup Sprint, and Spark Incubation Programmes):

- **Venture Creation Funding**: beneficiaries may receive financial support of up to EUR 30,000 to validate their business idea, market-test their product, establish a new legal entity and participate in the dedicated venture creation pathway (Startup Sprint + Spark Incubation Programme) aligned with the eligible cost categories outlined in Annex V. Activities covered through this financial support may include the development and testing of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) or Proof of Concept, customer validation and market testing, as well as the refinement of the value proposition and business model. The grant may also contribute to costs related to company formation and early operational needs.

- **Startup Sprint:** short, high-intensity, 2–3-day bootcamp designed to help early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs validate the problem they aim to solve. Up to 35 selected applicants participate in hands-on workshops, expert feedback sessions, rapid prototyping activities, inspirational talks, and field research to test the relevance, feasibility, and potential of their business ideas. Throughout the Startup Sprint, participants work closely with mentors and industry experts to strengthen their problem understanding, sharpen their value proposition, and assess early opportunities for market fit.
- **Spark Incubation Programme:** 9-month (primarily) online journey that supports selected participants actively towards company formation through structured sprints, workshops, hands-on venture formalisation support, mentorship, coaching, virtual kick-off, and access to a strong European innovation ecosystem. The programme combines expert mentorship with a series of hands-on sprints, each focused on a core topic and its deliverables.

The activities under this call (Sprints, Spark Incubation Programme and financial support) are designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs in validating their business ideas and building new ventures through a hands-on incubation journey. As such, the three activities are complementary and mandatory. It is not possible to benefit from the financial support without participating in the Startup Sprint and Incubation Programme.

2.2 Main requirements for applicants

This call targets individuals and teams working on early-stage business concepts and who have not yet registered a company. Below are the expected maturity level and key characteristics of ideal applicants, covering both applicant profile and the business idea.

1. Applicant profile

This call is open to individuals and multidisciplinary teams registered in an EU Member State or a Horizon Europe–associated country.

In addition, applicants must demonstrate:

- A team composition or clear plan to build a team with complementary skills across creative, technical, and business areas;
- Active engagement in developing the business concept, such as prototyping, testing, collaboration with partners, or participation in relevant events and training sessions;
- At least one founder committing 10–15 hours per week to programme-related activities;
- At least one founder with a minimum of one year of relevant domain experience, demonstrated through:
    - Formal education (e.g. master's degree, PhD),
    - Professional practice (e.g. as an employee, team member, intern),
    - Participation in incubation, entrepreneurship, or domain-specific programmes.

Applicants who have graduated from universities, municipalities, or domain-focused niche national or international incubation and entrepreneurship, including those from EIT Culture & Creativity partner network programmes are welcomed to apply. Graduates/alumni of EIT Culture & Creativity's Education programmes are also encouraged to apply.

2. The business concept

Applicants must present an early-stage pre-incorporation business concept within the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSI), specifically in advanced and circular materials and built environment (fashion & architecture).

The proposed idea must demonstrate:

- **A clear problem–solution hypothesis**, supported by initial validation activities such as research, user engagement, or early testing;
- **A defined solution concept**, evidenced through a prototype, demonstrator, or equivalent early-stage development;
- **Commercial potential**, including a clear pathway to becoming a scalable, for-profit venture;
- **A compelling value proposition**, with demonstrated awareness of existing alternatives, competitors, or market context (e.g. Benchmark);
- **Early innovation or meaningful differentiation** within the relevant sector(s);
- **Commitment to company creation**, including a clear intention to establish a legal entity by the end of the third month;
- **At least one form of tangible evidence** supporting the maturity of the idea, such as:
    - Product demo (max. 3 minutes),
    - Screenshots of a prototype or MVP, POC,
    - Link to a working demo,
    - Pilot or testing documentation,
    - Technical mock-ups or UX flows.

Applications lacking tangible evidence of progress beyond concept stage will not be considered competitive.

2.2.1 SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Eligibility of Associated Countries** – Countries in the process of associating with Horizon Europe must have completed their association agreement by the launch date of this call to be considered eligible. Only applicants from countries officially associated at the time of publication of this call will be eligible for funding. Any association agreements finalised after the call's publication date will not apply retroactively to this call. For reference, see paragraph "Third countries associated to Horizon Europe" in the List of participating countries in Horizon Europe. Please note: European

Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is situated in Pillar III. Countries eligible for funding under this call must be associated to Pillar III.

- **Individuals/Legal entities established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government controlled territories of Ukraine** — Given the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the involvement of Belarus, there is currently no appropriate context allowing the implementation of the actions foreseen in this programme with applicants established in Russia, Belarus, or in non-government controlled territories of Ukraine. Therefore, even where such applicants are not subject to EU restrictive measures, such applicants are not eligible to participate in any capacity. This includes participation as beneficiaries, subcontractors or recipients of financial support to third parties (if any). Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for justified reasons.
  With specific regard to measures addressed to Russia, following the adoption of the Council Regulation (EU) 2024/1745 of 24 June 2024[3] (amending Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July 2014) concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, applicants established outside Russia but whose proprietary rights are directly or indirectly owned for more than 50% by a legal person, entity or body established in Russia are also not eligible to participate in any capacity.
- **Measures for the protection of the Union budget against breaches of the principles of the rule of law in Hungary** — Following the Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/2506, as of 16 December 2022, no legal commitments can be entered into with Hungarian public interest trusts established under the Hungarian Act IX of 2021 or any entity they maintain. Affected applicants may continue to apply to calls for proposals and can participate without receiving EU funding, as associated partners, if allowed by the call conditions. However, as long as the Council measures are not lifted, such entities are not eligible to participate in any funded role (beneficiaries, subcontractors, recipients of financial support to third parties, etc.). In case of multi-beneficiary grant calls, applicants will be invited to remove or replace that entity in any funded role and/or to change its status into associated partner. Tasks and budget may be redistributed accordingly.

2.2.2 SUPPORTING THE KNOWLEDGE TRIANGLE INTEGRATION (KTI)

EIT Culture & Creativity applies a Knowledge Triangle Integration (KTI) approach by linking education, innovation, and business creation within a single venture-building pathway.

This call also facilitates an opportunity to connect graduates of EIT Culture & Creativity Education programmes with Business Creation activities that provide hands-on venture creation and incubation support. This enables them to translate skills, research outcomes, and creative ideas into newly established businesses. Graduates from EIT-labelled courses and education activities are therefore encouraged to apply to the Spark Incubation Programme.

[3] OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, p. 1–11

In addition, participants and beneficiaries of EIT Culture & Creativity Innovation and Transformation activities are encouraged to apply where their projects have generated technologies, intellectual property, creative assets, or market opportunities that could lead to the creation of a new venture. The Spark Incubation Programme provides a pathway to transform promising project outcomes into commercially viable businesses through structured venture creation, incubation support, and access to entrepreneurial expertise.

2.2.3 INTEGRATION OF RIS APPLICANTS

EIT Culture & Creativity encourages the participation of individuals/entities from countries with moderate or emerging innovation scores, as defined by the European Innovation Scoreboard. These countries are part of the Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS), and applicants from these regions are referred to as "RIS applicants".

2.3 Main requirements for project implementation

2.3.1 PROGRAMME DURATION

The total programme duration is 9 months, including in-person sprint and online incubation programme.

2.3.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING

Selected projects will be managed in line with the established project implementation and monitoring procedures, ensuring effective execution, compliance, and alignment with EIT requirements, including any updates that may apply. Beneficiaries are responsible for implementing the approved work plan and ensuring timely delivery of deliverables, milestones and KPI targets, while EIT Culture & Creativity will monitor progress and provide guidance and support throughout implementation.

Any significant changes to the approved implementation, including material changes to the work plan, ownership structure or major budget reallocations, require prior formal approval from EIT Culture & Creativity. In case of underperformance or non-compliance, EIT Culture & Creativity may apply corrective measures, including adjustments to the financial support in accordance with the subgrant agreement.

EIT Culture & Creativity is committed to **gender equality, diversity and inclusion (GEDI)**. Applicants must demonstrate how GEDI considerations are meaningfully embedded throughout the design, development and implementation of project outputs, using an **intersectional perspective** where relevant. Projects must comply with the principles set out in **Annex 5 (Specific Rules, Values) of the Horizon Europe Model Grant Agreement** and the EIT Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan 2025-2027.

2.3.3 DELIVERABLES AND REPORTING CHECKPOINTS

The deliverables listed below are mandatory programme monitoring and progression requirements. They are used to assess implementation progress, completion of programme milestones and readiness to continue to the next stage of the Spark Incubation Programme.

Financial support under this call follows an actual-cost model. Acceptance of a deliverable does not in itself constitute acceptance or reimbursement of actual costs and does not determine the final EIT Culture & Creativity contribution. Payments made during implementation are prefinancing payments governed by Section 3.3.

Actual eligible costs will be formally reported and assessed through the applicable financial reporting process. Final financial reporting will take place at the end of the programme in December 2027, followed by the financial review and settlement process between January and March 2028. Any outstanding balance is expected to be paid in April 2028, subject to acceptance of the actual eligible costs reported.

Indicative timing	Deliverable / checkpoint	Description / requirements	Financial / progression implications
March 2027 – Month 0 / programme start	DEL1 – Programme start	• Participation in the Startup Sprint; • Submission of the refined Venture Execution Plan; • Signature of the Participation Agreement; • Signature of the initial Subgrant Agreement with the selected individual or team representative.	Programme-start checkpoint. An **initial prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000** may be made in accordance with Section 3.3 once the applicable contracting requirements have been completed. This payment does not constitute reimbursement or acceptance of actual costs.
June 2027 – Month 3	DEL2 – Company creation and transition checkpoint	• Updated Venture Execution Plan; • Evidence of market testing; • Proof of incorporation of the new company, with at least 50% combined ownership and effective control retained by the originally selected applicant(s); • Registration in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal and valid PIC;	Programme monitoring and company-transition checkpoint. Following satisfactory completion of the Month 3 requirements and contractual transition, a **second prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000** may be made to the newly incorporated company in accordance with Section 3.3. This checkpoint does **not** constitute an interim

Indicative timing	Deliverable / checkpoint	Description / requirements	Financial / progression implications
		• Successful legal entity validation through the EIT Community Onboarding Service; • Completion of the applicable contractual transition to the newly incorporated company; • Updated budget/use-of-funds overview.	actual-cost claim or financial settlement.
December 2027 – Month 9 / end of programme implementation	DEL3 – Final programme deliverable	• Final technical and performance report, including product, prototype or MVP evidence; • KPI and output evidence; • Updated Pitch Deck; • Participation in the end-of-programme survey; • Participation in the closing event; • Explanation of relevant deviations and summary of next steps.	Final programme monitoring checkpoint. **DEL3 does not trigger a fixed payment.** The beneficiary must also complete the applicable final financial reporting for the reporting period ending in **December 2027**. Financial settlement will be based on the actual eligible costs reported and accepted in accordance with Section 3.3.

2.3.4 FINAL FINANCIAL REVIEW AND SETTLEMENT

Following the end of programme implementation in **December 2027**, EIT Culture & Creativity will review the final financial reporting and actual costs declared between **January and March 2028**.

The final EIT Culture & Creativity contribution will be determined on the basis of the actual eligible costs accepted, up to the maximum contribution of **EUR 30,000** per selected project. The final financial settlement is expected in **April 2028**. Where both prefinancing payments have been made, any outstanding balance may be up to **EUR 6,000**. Where the cumulative prefinancing exceeds the final accepted contribution, the corresponding amount will be recovered.

2.3.5 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIS)

The activities delivered under this call are expected to contribute to the achievement of EIT Culture & Creativity's Business Creation KPIs, notably:

- **EITHE03.1** – Number of startups and scale-ups supported by the KIC for at least two months in the reporting year
- **EITHE04.1** – Number of startups established in the reporting year
- **EITHE06.1** – Total euro amount of private and public capital attracted within year N by supported startups and scale-ups

Formal KPI ownership, consolidation and reporting to the EIT remain the responsibility of EIT Culture & Creativity. EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the right to ask selected applicants to provide evidence and documentation for reporting purposes.

2.3.6 FAST-TRACKING

EIT Culture & Creativity may offer a fast-track opportunity for up to five top-performing graduates of the Spark Incubation Programme to access the Shape Accelerator Programme for additional support for scaling. On the condition that they conclude the Spark programme fully and meet the admission requirements of the Shape Acceleration Programme as stated in the Open call for Financial Support to Startups and Scaleups (Business Plan 2026-2028).

Participants interested in the opportunity to fast-track their projects will be required to enter into a subgrant agreement with EIT Culture & Creativity as part of the eligibility criteria to join the Shape Acceleration Programme.

The fast-track decision, if applied, will be based on the project's final review (and/or other clearly defined performance evidence) and may require an additional assessment. Any follow-up support will be formalised through a separate contracting step (e.g., amendment or new agreement) and will follow applicable transparency, equal treatment and conflict-of-interest safeguards. Fast-tracking is not automatic and does not constitute an entitlement.

3. Financial aspects of the call

3.1 KIC funding

The total maximum EIT Culture & Creativity financial support available for this call is EUR 1,050,000 from the Business Plan 2026–2028, conditional and subject to formal approval by the EIT.

Financial support under this call is provided under an **actual-cost model**. Each selected project may receive an EIT Culture & Creativity contribution of up to EUR 30,000, corresponding to up to 100% of actual eligible costs incurred during the applicable eligibility and reporting period(s), reported and accepted in accordance with the applicable Subgrant Agreement and cost eligibility rules. The maximum amount of EUR 30,000 does not constitute an automatic entitlement.

Two prefinancing payments are foreseen during programme implementation:

- an initial prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000 at the start of the programme, subject to completion of the applicable initial contracting requirements; and
- a second prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000 following the Month 3 programme monitoring checkpoint, incorporation and successful validation of the new company, and completion of the applicable contractual transition requirements.

These payments constitute **prefinancing only** and do not represent reimbursement or acceptance of actual costs incurred, nor are they earned through the acceptance of individual deliverables.

Actual eligible costs will be formally reported and assessed through the applicable financial reporting process and reporting period(s). Following the final financial assessment, the final EIT Culture & Creativity contribution will be established on the basis of the actual eligible costs accepted, up to the maximum amount awarded. Any outstanding balance will be paid to the beneficiary, while any excess prefinancing will be recovered. Where both prefinancing payments have been made and the maximum contribution of EUR 30,000 is accepted, the remaining balance will be EUR 6,000.

3.1.1 EIT FUNDING AND DOUBLE FUNDING RESTRICTION

Applicants and beneficiaries must ensure that the activities, costs, outputs and results financed under this call are not already funded, or planned to be funded, through any other EIT-funded instrument or other EU funding source. Costs already funded by another EU programme or source cannot be reimbursed by EIT Culture & Creativity.

3.2 Reimbursement rate

The reimbursement rate is 100% of eligible costs, subject to a maximum EIT Culture & Creativity contribution of EUR 30,000 per selected project. No co-funding applies under this call.

The maximum contribution of EUR 30,000 includes both eligible direct costs and the applicable indirect costs.

3.3 Payment arrangements

Financial support under this call is implemented through an actual-cost model. The amount ultimately retained by the beneficiary will therefore be determined on the basis of actual eligible costs incurred, reported and accepted in accordance with the applicable Subgrant Agreement and cost eligibility rules, up to a maximum EIT Culture & Creativity contribution of EUR 30,000 per selected project.

At the start of the programme, the selected individual or team representative will enter into the applicable initial Subgrant Agreement with EIT Culture & Creativity and may receive an initial prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000.

By Month 3, the selected applicant(s) must incorporate the new company established for the implementation of the selected venture. The company must obtain a PIC, successfully complete legal entity validation through the EIT Community Onboarding Service, comply with the applicable eligibility requirements, and complete the contractual transition from the initially selected individual or team representative to the newly incorporated company.

The contractual transition will be implemented through a second Subgrant Agreement with the newly incorporated company or, where legally appropriate, through an amendment or novation of the initial Subgrant Agreement. From the effective date of this transition, the newly incorporated company will become the recipient of the remaining financial support and responsible for subsequent project implementation and financial reporting.

Following successful completion of the Month 3 programme monitoring checkpoint and the contractual transition described above, EIT Culture & Creativity may provide a second prefinancing payment of EUR 12,000 to the newly incorporated company.

Deliverables and programme milestones are used for implementation monitoring and progression purposes. They do not in themselves determine the amount of eligible costs or the final EIT Culture & Creativity contribution, and their acceptance does not constitute acceptance or reimbursement of actual costs.

Actual eligible costs will be reported through the financial reporting process and reporting period(s) established in the applicable Subgrant Agreement(s). Costs must be incurred by the relevant recipient during its applicable eligibility period and must comply with the cost eligibility requirements set out in this call, Annex V and the applicable contractual arrangements.

At the end of the programme, the beneficiary will submit the required final technical and financial reporting. EIT Culture & Creativity will review the actual costs declared and determine the final eligible contribution. The final settlement will correspond to the difference between the final accepted EIT Culture & Creativity contribution and the cumulative prefinancing already paid.

Where the final accepted contribution exceeds the cumulative prefinancing, the outstanding balance will be paid to the beneficiary. Where the cumulative prefinancing exceeds the final accepted contribution, the corresponding amount will be recovered. In all cases, the total EIT Culture & Creativity contribution may not exceed EUR 30,000 per selected project.

3.4 Financial sustainability requirements

EIT Culture & Creativity, as a Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), is required to implement financial sustainability mechanisms in line with EIT rules. These mechanisms support the long-term sustainability of the KIC by enabling it to reinvest part of the value generated through its activities back into its mission, portfolio, and ecosystem. Financial sustainability mechanisms are not intended to produce short-term financial returns, but to support long-term stability, reinvestment, continuity, and the expansion of impact across Europe's cultural and creative sectors.

This call does not require beneficiaries to sign a Financial Sustainability Mechanism to benefit from the financial and programme support. However, Spark Incubation Programme participants who complete the programme, and seek eligibility for fast-tracking into the Shape Acceleration Programme will be required to enter into a Financial Sustainability Mechanism as a condition for such eligibility.

3.5 Cost eligibility

For details on which project budget costs are eligible, please refer to Annex V, the relevant Project Agreement, the applicable provisions of Article 6 of the EIT Culture & Creativity Grant Agreement document "eligibility of expenditure," available on the call website programme.

4. Call criteria

Following the deadline for submission, the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria checks will be performed for each proposal in line with the following criteria.

Proposals failing to meet one or more criteria will receive an official communication from EIT Culture & Creativity, informing the applicant of the outcome of the admissibility and eligibility check and explaining why the proposal failed to meet the criteria.

4.1 Admissibility

- **Deadline:** The application is submitted before the call deadline (see Overview). Any proposals submitted after the deadline will be inadmissible.
- **Submission format:** The application is submitted using the forms provided inside the electronic submission system (see Overview), including all mandatory templates.
- **Completeness:** The application is complete and contains all required sections, mandatory annexes and supporting documents as specified in the call/topic conditions and in the electronic submission system.
- **Language:** The application and all mandatory annexes and supporting documents are written entirely in English.
- **Accessibility:** The application is readable, accessible and printable.
- **Character limit:** The application respects the maximum character limits defined for each section of the application form. If any section exceeds the specified character limit, the application will not be admissible.

Only proposals satisfying all the admissibility criteria shall pass on to the eligibility criteria assessment stage.

4.2 Eligibility

Following the admissibility check, only proposals meeting all eligibility conditions below (and any additional call/topic-specific conditions) will be considered for evaluation:

- **Applicant type:** The application must be submitted by an individual or the representative of the multidisciplinary team that meets all mandatory applicant requirements set out in Section 2.2. Applicants that represent a legally incorporated venture are not eligible.

By Month 3, the selected applicant(s) must incorporate a new legal entity. To continue in the programme and receive financial support beyond Month 3, the newly incorporated company must meet the following requirements:

- **Registration (PIC):** The newly incorporated company is registered in the EU Funding & tender opportunities portal and have a nine-digit Participant Identification Code (PIC number).

- **Legal status & eligibility:** The newly incorporated company is an eligible legal entity and complies with the applicable Horizon Europe eligibility rules (including not being subject to EU restrictive measures under Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) as well as Article 75 TFEU).
- **Ownership:** The originally selected applicant(s) must retain at least 50% combined ownership and effective control of the newly incorporated company.
- **Country eligibility:** The newly incorporated company must be registered in an eligible country under Horizon Europe.
- **Additional EU restrictions** may apply (e.g., specific country- or entity-related restrictions, and measures protecting the Union budget/security interests), as set out in the Horizon Europe rules and reflected in the call/topic conditions.

4.3 Exclusion criteria

Applicants will be excluded from participation in the call and from funding if they are subject to EU administrative sanctions or fall under any exclusion grounds set out in Article 138(1) of the EU Financial Regulation. This includes situations such as:

- Insolvency, bankruptcy, or similar legal proceedings;
- Breach of social security or tax obligations;
- Grave professional misconduct;
- Fraud, corruption, criminal activity, terrorism-related crimes, child labour or human trafficking;
- Serious non-compliance with obligations under previous EU contracts or grants;
- EU law irregularities within the meaning of Article 1(2) of Regulation No 2988/9534;
- Creating entities to circumvent fiscal, social or other legal obligations;
- Misrepresentation or failure to provide required information;
- Conflict of interest or unfair advantage in the award procedure.

Applicants selected for funding will be required to sign a **Declaration of Honour** in the format provided under the **Subgrant agreement**. By signing the Declaration of Honour, applicants confirm that they are not in any of the exclusion situations and that all information provided is accurate and complete.

The newly incorporated company established by Month 3 will undergo legal entity validation through the EIT Community Onboarding Service before it can receive financial support beyond Month 3.

4.4 Award procedure

This section defines the evaluation and selection framework applicable to applications submitted under this call. Eligible proposals will be assessed by three independent external expert evaluators through an

external quality evaluation against the mandatory Horizon Europe award criteria: **(a) Excellence, (b) Impact, and (c) Quality and efficiency of the implementation.** The following EIT-specific criteria, as applicable to this call: **(d) KIC portfolio strategic fit and contribution to financial sustainability objectives** will be assessed during the portfolio selection.

Step 1: External quality evaluation: Proposals passing the admissibility and eligibility checks will proceed to an external quality evaluation. Scoring will follow a **1–5 scale** (whole points only) and evaluators will provide a written justification for each criteria score. Each eligible proposal will be independently assessed against the award criteria set out below. Criteria are broken down into sub-criteria as specified in the call.

- **Excellence** — maximum score: 15 points;
- **Impact** — maximum score: 10 points;
- **Quality and efficiency of the implementation** – maximum score: 25 points.

Following completion of the individual assessments, a consensus meeting will be held involving the three external expert evaluators and a designated rapporteur. During the consensus meeting, the external evaluators will discuss their individual assessments and agree on the final consensus scores and consolidated comments for the proposal.
The rapporteur will support and document the consensus process and prepare the Evaluation Summary Report reflecting the final scores, the proposal's main strengths and weaknesses, and the conclusions agreed during the consensus meeting. The rapporteur will not assign an additional independent score.
The maximum score available under the external quality evaluation is 50 points.

Following completion of the external quality evaluation, Spark proposals will be ranked in descending order based on their final external quality evaluation score. Up to the 35 highest-ranked Spark proposals will proceed to the portfolio selection stage.

Step 2: Portfolio selection: Proposals proceeding to portfolio selection will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **KIC portfolio strategic fit and compliance with the financial sustainability objectives** — maximum score: 30 points.

The portfolio selection process, applicable sub-criteria and scoring methodology are described in Section 4.4.2.

The final score for each proposal will be calculated as the sum of:

- the final external quality evaluation score, with a maximum of 50 points; and
- the portfolio selection score, with a maximum of 30 points.

The maximum final score is therefore 80 points.

Financial support will be awarded following the final ranking and subject to the available Spark Programme budget, the applicable maximum financial support per participant, and completion of the required verification and contracting procedures.

4.4.1. STEP 1: EXTERNAL QUALITY EVALUATION

Eligible proposals will be assessed by three independent external expert evaluators against the mandatory Horizon Europe award criteria: **(a) Excellence, (b) Impact, and (c) Quality and efficiency of the implementation.** Given the mono-beneficiary nature of the Spark Incubation Programme, the EIT-specific criteria on EU dimension for multi-beneficiary projects is not applicable under this call.

The KIC portfolio strategic fit criteria is not assessed during the external quality evaluation and will be assessed separately during the portfolio selection stage described in Section 4.4.2. Scoring will follow a 1-5 scale using whole points only. Each evaluator will independently assign provisional scores and provide a written justification for each applicable sub-criteria. Following the individual assessments, the three external evaluators will agree on the final scores and consolidated comments during the consensus meeting described in Section 4.4.1. Where a weighting factor of ×2 applies, the final consensus score will be multiplied by two.

Scoring framework:

A) Excellence	Maximum score: 15 points
A1. Problem & Solution Clarity Clarity and relevance of the problem addressed and coherence of the proposed solution.	5 points
A2. Innovation & Differentiation Degree of novelty, originality, or meaningful differentiation of the idea.	5 points
A3. Gender mainstreaming and the integration of the gender dimension Extent to which relevant gender equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are integrated into the development of the proposed business idea.	5 points

B) Impact	Maximum score: 10 points
B1. Relevance to CCSI & Use of Technology Relevance to Cultural and Creative Sectors and meaningful use of technology especially the use of emerging tools and developments such as AI.	5 points
B2. Execution Plan and Use of Funds Quality, realism, and coherence of the execution plan, including milestones, timelines, and proposed use of funds.	5 points

C) Quality and efficiency of the implementation	Maximum score: 25 points
C1. Commercial logic and venture viability Early understanding of how the venture could create and capture value as a for profit, scalable, tech centric business (digital, hardware, or material innovation). Revenues and pricing are not required.	5 points
C2. Founder / Team Capability & Commitment Skills, motivation, domain understanding, and commitment of the founder(s) to venture creation.	5 points
C3. Lean Business Canvas Quality & Hypothesis Strength Quality and coherence of the Lean Business Canvas, including the internal logic between the problem, customer segment, value proposition, proposed solution, commercial logic, key assumptions and testable hypotheses.	5 points
C4. Prototype / Concept Evidence Quality and relevance of tangible evidence demonstrating the current stage of the solution, showing that the team is already building, testing, or validating the concept (e.g. prototype, demo, mock-up, or pilot), rather than only ideating.	5 points
C5. Entrepreneurial Spirit & Experience Evidence of the founders' engagement with entrepreneurship, including prior participation in startup programmes, venture-building activities, or relevant initiatives, demonstrating motivation, commitment, and readiness to develop a venture.	5 points

The final external quality evaluation score will be calculated as the sum of the final consensus scores obtained under all applicable sub-criteria, with a maximum total score of 50 points. Following completion of the external quality evaluation, Spark proposals will be ranked in descending order based on their final external quality evaluation score. Up to the 35 highest-ranked Spark proposals will proceed to the portfolio selection stage described in Section 4.4.2.

4.4.1.2 EXTERNAL QUALITY EVALUATION SCORING FRAMEWORK

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Score 1 (Very Poor)	Score 2 (Poor)	Score 3 (Fair)	Score 4 (Good)	Score 5 (Excellent)
Excellence	A1. Problem & Solution Clarity	Problem unclear or not relevant; solution poorly defined or disconnected.	Problem vaguely articulated and not understood; solution weakly connected to the problem.	Clear problem–solution link, but assumptions largely untested.	Well-defined problem with a logical, testable solution suitable for sprint validation.	Sharp and compelling problem–solution fit with clear hypotheses and validation focus.
	A2. Innovation & Differentiation	No innovation or differentiation from existing solutions or copy of existing/known solution.	Limited originality; differentiation unclear or minor or easy to copy.	Innovative intent with emerging differentiation, though the innovation remains early-stage and not yet clearly articulated or defensible.	Clear innovation driver (technology, model, UX, process) with strong differentiation potential with right external signals.	Highly distinctive and innovative concept with strong potential to stand out in the focused domain-industry.
	A3. Gender mainstreaming and the integration of the gender dimension	No or irrelevant consideration of gender, diversity or inclusion.	Limited consideration; weak link to the business idea.	Relevant considerations identified, but only partially developed.	Clear and meaningful integration into the business idea.	Strong, well-integrated and convincing approach to GEDI.
Impact	B1. Relevance to CCSI & Use of Technology	Not relevant to CCSI; no meaningful technology component.	Weak or indirect relevance; technology marginal.	Clear relevance to CCSI with basic or emerging technology use.	Strong relevance with technology clearly enabling value creation.	Highly relevant creative technology idea with strong transformative tech potential.

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Score 1 (Very Poor)	Score 2 (Poor)	Score 3 (Fair)	Score 4 (Good)	Score 5 (Excellent)
	B2. Execution Plan and Use of Funds	Execution plan and fund allocation is unclear, unbalanced, unrealistic, or poorly linked to outcomes.	The plan is partially defined but lacks credibility or coherence. The budget allocation is not fit the maturity or reality of the venture concept.	Clear and feasible plan with reasonable milestones and use of funds.	Well-structured plan with strong alignment between activities, milestones, and expected outcomes.	Highly convincing execution plan with clear prioritisation, discipline, and strong likelihood of delivery. Use of funds is clear and aligned with milestones.
Quality & Efficiency of Implementation	C1. Commercial Logic & Venture Viability	No credible commercial logic is presented. No clear explanation of who would pay, why value would be created, or how the idea could become a for-profit venture.	Commercial intent is mentioned, but remains vague or weakly connected to customer need, market demand, or a plausible path to revenue.	Plausible early commercial logic is identified, with initial assumptions about users, market need, and how the venture may generate value.	Clear and coherent early commercial logic showing how the venture could create, capture, and scale value as a viable for-profit business.	Strong early commercial thinking supported by credible assumptions, clear scaling ambition, and a convincing path toward a sustainable, scalable venture.
	C2. Founder / Team Capability & Commitment	Major skill gaps, or lack of commitment and/or lack of (or none) domain expertise / knowledge in the founding team; credibility concerns.	Limited experience or unclear roles, and/or unclear how founder(s)' expertise reflect on the venture's success; execution risks evident.	Core skills present with willingness to learn and develop the venture; but signals for doubt for the sustainability of the venture.	Strong commitment with complementary skills or a clear plan to build the team.	Highly capable, motivated founders with strong execution and leadership potential. Or/and Experienced (serial) founders.

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Score 1 (Very Poor)	Score 2 (Poor)	Score 3 (Fair)	Score 4 (Good)	Score 5 (Excellent)
	C3. Lean Business Canvas Quality & Hypothesis Strength	Canvas missing, substantially incomplete, or internally inconsistent. Core elements (problem, customer, solution, value logic) are absent or contradictory.	Canvas completed superficially, with weak internal logic. Key assumptions are vague, generic, or poorly connected. Limited evidence of structured venture thinking.	Core elements are present and broadly coherent. Key assumptions and hypotheses are identifiable, though still underdeveloped or largely untested.	Clear and coherent canvas showing strong internal logic across core elements, explicit assumptions, and testable hypotheses linked to early validation thinking.	Excellent canvas demonstrating strong strategic thinking, well-articulated hypotheses, internal consistency across all key elements, and a credible focus on experimentation, validation, and venture development.
	C4. Prototype / Concept Evidence	No tangible evidence provided; concept remains purely ideational.	Very weak or unclear evidence; prototype or concept difficult to assess.	Early-stage prototype or concept clearly presented and suitable for initial validation.	Solid prototype, mock-up, demo, or pilot enabling meaningful testing during the Sprint.	Strong, well-documented prototype or pilot demonstrating clear progress, learning, and validation focus.
	C5. Entrepreneurial Spirit & Experience	No evidence of entrepreneurial activity; no participation in startup-related programmes or initiatives.	Entrepreneurial interest mentioned but no tangible evidence; no prior participation in structured programmes.	Limited evidence of early engagement (e.g. events, short workshops, informal initiatives) with no clear outcomes.	Clear participation in structured entrepreneurship programmes (e.g. incubators, hackathons, university programmes), with supporting evidence.	Strong entrepreneurial track record: participation in multiple programmes and/or prior founder experience, supported by clear and credible evidence.

4.4.2. STEP 2: PORTFOLIO SELECTION

Following the external quality evaluation, the 35 highest-ranked Spark proposals will be invited to the portfolio selection interview. The next 15 highest-ranked proposals will constitute a portfolio-selection reserve pool. If one or more of the initially invited proposals fail to meet the portfolio selection thresholds or withdraw, proposals from the reserve pool will be invited in descending order of their external quality evaluation score, as needed, until up to 35 proposals meeting the portfolio selection thresholds are identified.

The interview forms part of the portfolio selection stage and will be used to assess the proposals against the portfolio selection criteria and sub-criteria defined below. The interview will allow the Selection Committee to clarify, test and further assess the applicant's strategic fit, product-market fit, investment potential, team capacity, financial sustainability potential, and alignment with EIT Culture & Creativity's portfolio objectives.

Applicants invited to the portfolio selection interview will be informed in writing of the date, format, duration, presentation requirements, and practical arrangements. The interview will normally last up to 20 minutes and will include:

- A short presentation by the applicant, up to 10 minutes; and
- A question-and-answer session with the Selection Committee, up to 10 minutes.

Applicants will be requested to prepare a short presentation to support the interview. The presentation must be based on the submitted proposal and may not be used to introduce a substantially different proposal, scope of activities, funding request or business model.

The Selection Committee members will assess each proposal on the basis of the submitted application and the interview against the Strategic Fit criteria and sub-criteria set out below. The final portfolio selection score and written justification will be documented as part of the evaluation process.

Scoring framework:

- **KIC portfolio strategic fit and contribution to financial sustainability objectives** (maximum score: 30 points and minimum score: 24 points)
    - Sub-criteria 1: Market Validation [maximum score: 5 points x 2]
    - Sub-criteria 2: Growth Potential [maximum score: 5 points x 2]
    - Sub-criteria 3: Financial Sustainability & Portfolio Alignment [maximum score: 5 points x 2]

To remain eligible for selection, proposals must meet both: (i) an overall portfolio selection threshold of at least 24/30; and (ii) the minimum score established for each sub-criteria: 3/5 for Market Validation, 4/5 for Growth Potential, and 3/5 for Financial Sustainability & Portfolio Alignment. Proposals failing either condition will not be selected, regardless of their overall ranking.

The final score will be calculated as the sum of the external quality evaluation score, with a maximum of 50 points, and the portfolio selection score, with a maximum of 30 points. The maximum final score is

therefore 80 points. Among applicants meeting the minimum threshold above, proposals will be ranked in descending order of their final score, and financial support will be awarded following the final ranking until the available Spark Programme spots are exhausted, which is 35 spots for this cohort.

Non-selected applicants may be placed on a reserve list in accordance with this call, to be considered again in case of dropouts from the selected list provided they fulfil the portfolio selection threshold criteria.

Scoring framework:

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Description	Max. Score: 30 points (15 x 2)	Threshold: 24 points (12 x 2)
KIC portfolio strategic fit and contribution to financial sustainability objectives	Sub-criteria 1: Market Validation	Evidence that the solution addresses a clearly identified customer or market need, demonstrated through credible market analysis, understanding of the potential customer and other market input. The idea shows promising potential to become a scalable venture relevant to EIT Culture & Creativity priority areas.	5 points	3 points
	Sub-criteria 2: Growth Potential	Potential of the team to lead a new venture demonstrated through the ability to clearly articulate the value proposition of the idea, including the founders' ability to engage effectively with potential partners, customers, team members and international stakeholders; contributing to a balanced, investable, and high-quality EIT Culture & Creativity portfolio.	5 points	4 points
	Sub-criteria 3: Financial Sustainability & Portfolio Alignment	Project outlook and understanding of the future venture's funding needs, growth trajectory, and business model align with EIT Culture & Creativity's financial sustainability objectives and portfolio strategy.	5 points	3 points

4.4.2.2 SCORING FRAMEWORK: PORTFOLIO SELECTION

Sub-criteria	Score 1 (Very Poor)	Score 2 (Poor)	Score 3 (Fair)	Score 4 (Good)	Score 5 (Excellent)
Sub-criteria 1: Market Validation	No credible evidence of customer need, market demand, or validation. Customer segment is unclear or unsupported.	Limited understanding of the target market. Validation is anecdotal, weak, or based on assumptions with little supporting evidence.	Initial market validation activities completed. Customer need is reasonably articulated and supported by some user feedback, research, or market evidence.	Strong evidence of customer need and market relevance. Validation activities demonstrate a good understanding of users, market dynamics, and adoption potential.	Compelling and well-evidenced market validation. Strong proof of demand, customer engagement, and market opportunity, indicating high potential for venture creation and growth.
Sub-criteria 2: Growth Potential	Founders are unable to clearly explain the venture, its value proposition, or next steps. Limited evidence of execution to date. Significant concerns regarding commitment, adaptability, or ability to benefit from incubation support.	Growth potential is weakly defined. Value proposition lacks clarity and founders show limited ability to engage stakeholders or demonstrate leadership potential.	Venture demonstrates a plausible growth pathway. Founders communicate the value proposition adequately and show potential to engage customers, partners, and ecosystem actors.	Strong growth potential supported by a clear value proposition, ambitious vision, and capable founders able to attract stakeholders and leverage incubation support effectively.	Outstanding growth potential. Founders demonstrate exceptional leadership, communication skills, ambition, and ability to position the venture for investment, scaling, and international expansion.

Sub-criteria	Score 1 (Very Poor)	Score 2 (Poor)	Score 3 (Fair)	Score 4 (Good)	Score 5 (Excellent)
Sub-criteria 3: Financial Sustainability & Portfolio Alignment	No understanding of future funding needs, business sustainability, or alignment with EIT Culture & Creativity priorities.	Limited awareness of financing requirements or long-term sustainability. Alignment with portfolio priorities remains weak or unclear.	Basic understanding of future funding requirements, business development needs, and strategic alignment with EIT Culture & Creativity objectives.	Clear and credible outlook regarding venture sustainability, future financing, and portfolio contribution. Strong alignment with programme priorities and expected outcomes.	Highly convincing financial sustainability vision with realistic funding strategy, strong growth trajectory, and excellent alignment with EIT Culture & Creativity's portfolio strategy and long-term impact objectives.

4.4.3. RANKING AND AWARDING IN A NUTSHELL

Proposals will be evaluated and ranked based on their comparative value in accordance with the evaluation procedure specified in this call. While there is no minimum score threshold for the external evaluation stage, a minimum threshold will be applied during the final evaluation stage (portfolio selection).

The 35 highest-ranked proposals from the external evaluation stage will proceed to the main portfolio selection stage, while the next 15 proposals will form a reserve list to be invited for an interview should any of the top 35 proposals fail to meet the minimum threshold.

The Spark Incubation Programme has up to 35 places available for the 2027 cohort. The final list of participants will be determined during the portfolio selection stage. Of the ranked proposals, the top 35 that meet the minimum threshold will be accepted into the Spark Incubation Programme.

5. Evaluation procedure

5.1 Admissibility and eligibility, exclusion and selection stages

After the submission deadline, EIT Culture & Creativity conducts a structured, multi-step verification and evaluation process to ensure full compliance with the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion, and selection criteria.

1. Admissibility and eligibility check

EIT Culture & Creativity's Project Management Office (PMO) performs an initial screening to verify compliance with formal admissibility and eligibility requirements as defined in Section 4. Proposals failing to meet these criteria are rejected at this stage, and applicants are formally notified of the outcome and the reasons for rejection.

2. External quality evaluation

Proposals passing the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection checks will proceed to an external quality evaluation. Each eligible proposal will be independently assessed by three external expert evaluators against the award criteria defined in Section 4.4.1.

Each external evaluator will prepare an individual assessment containing provisional scores and written justifications. Following completion of the individual assessments, a consensus meeting will be held with the three external evaluators and a designated rapporteur. During the consensus meeting, the evaluators will agree on the final scores and consolidated comments.

The rapporteur will support and document the consensus process and prepare the Evaluation Summary Report. The rapporteur will not assign an additional independent score.

3. Internal portfolio selection / online interview stage

Where portfolio selection is applied as a separate assessment stage, the highest-ranked proposals proceeding to portfolio selection in accordance with Section 4.4.2 will be invited to an online interview with the EIT Culture & Creativity Selection Committee. The online interview will form part of the portfolio selection stage and will be assessed against the portfolio selection criteria defined in Section 4.4.2.

The Selection Committee will be formally appointed by EIT Culture & Creativity and will normally be composed of:

- One representative from EIT Culture & Creativity with relevant Business Creation expertise;
- One additional EIT Culture & Creativity management, programme or portfolio representative;
- One independent external expert with relevant investment, venture-building, scale-up, financial sustainability or sector expertise; and
- One external observer, where applicable, who will not participate in the scoring or ranking.

All voting members will be subject to the applicable independence, conflict-of-interest and confidentiality requirements.

The interview will last up to 20 minutes and may include:

- A short presentation by the applicant, up to 10 minutes;
- A question-and-answer session with the Selection Committee, up to 10 minutes;
- Clarification covering product-market fit and growth potential, team skills and capacity to benefit from incubation, and financial sustainability and portfolio alignment — including market validation, scaling plans, fundraising readiness, use of funds, and strategic fit with EIT Culture & Creativity's portfolio objectives.

Applicants invited to interview will receive written instructions, including the interview date, format, duration, presentation requirements and submission deadline for any presentation material. Unless otherwise specified, the presentation should be based on the submitted proposal and should not exceed 10 slides.

Failure to attend the interview without duly justified reasons may result in the proposal not being considered further for portfolio selection and final ranking.

4. Final ranking list

The final score, ranking and award procedure will be determined in accordance with Sections 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3

5.2 Evaluation procedure

All eligible proposals are evaluated by three independent external experts, selected on the basis of their expertise in the subject matter of the call. Experts evaluate proposals against the defined award criteria and provide scores and written justifications. The requirements set out in Horizon Europe practice on expert selection, conduct, impartiality, and confidentiality are fully applied.

Based on the evaluation results, proposals are ranked according to their total scores, and the selection is made strictly following this ranking

5.2.1 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Each proposal is evaluated through three step evaluation process:

- Admissibility and Eligibility Check
- External Evaluation
- Portfolio Selection

against the award criteria in Section 4.4 using a numerical scoring system with defined maximum scores and minimum thresholds per phase.

After the final ranking, the top 35 applications meeting all thresholds and the overall minimum score are eligible for participating the Spark Incubation Programme (including the Startup Sprint) and receive funding.

Final rankings are based on total scores, with ties resolved using the rules in Section 5.2.3.

5.2.2 RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION: AWARD, RESERVE LIST, REJECTION

Following completion of the evaluation procedure, the award decision for participation in the Spark Incubation Programme is taken by EIT Culture & Creativity, based on the final ranking established during the portfolio selection stage. Applications are selected in strict descending order of ranking, subject to meeting the minimum thresholds set out in Section 4.4.2. There are up to 35 spots available for the Spark Incubation Programme (including the Startup Sprint) for the 2027 cohort.

Proposals that are not ranked high enough are **rejected** and will not be considered for funding.

5.2.3 TIE-BREAKING RULES

In the event of tied scores during the external quality evaluation process, applications will be prioritised in the following order:

- Applications scoring higher on the Quality & Efficiency of Implementation
- Applications scoring higher on the Excellence

In the event of tied scores during the Portfolio Selection assessment process, applications will be prioritised in the following order:

- Applications scoring higher on Sub-criteria 2: Growth Potential
- Applications scoring higher on Sub-criteria 1: Market Validation

5.3 Communication of evaluation results to applicants

Following the award decision, EIT Culture & Creativity will inform all applicants of the evaluation results in writing. The lead applicant will receive a formal notification by email from the EIT Culture & Creativity PMO (pmo@eit-culture-creativity.eu), indicating whether the proposal has been **selected for participation, placed on the reserve list, or rejected**. This notification will include the **Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)** as an attachment, detailing the scores and comments from the external quality evaluation.

This communication constitutes the official outcome notification of the evaluation process and will be sent to the email address provided by the lead applicant. The applicable standstill period will start on the day following the dispatch of this communication.

The notification of results does not create an unconditional entitlement to EIT Culture & Creativity financial support. Any proposal indicated as selected remains subject to the expiry of the applicable standstill period,

the outcome of any appeal or evaluation review procedure, the successful completion of the applicable contracting and onboarding process, and the availability of the allocated call budget. No financial support shall be considered granted until the applicable Subgrant Agreement has been duly signed by all required parties.

If an applicant requests further clarification regarding the evaluation result, they may contact EIT Culture & Creativity at pmo@eit-culture-creativity.eu.

Selected applicants may be invited to begin the applicable Subgrant Agreement preparation and onboarding process during the standstill period. However, no Subgrant Agreement will be signed before the end of the applicable standstill period and completion of the procedural and contracting checks required before signature.

5.4 Standstill period

Following the final award decision and the written communication of results to applicants, EIT Culture & Creativity will apply the standstill period applicable to this call, counted from the day after the dispatch of the communication of results.

The standard standstill period is 30 calendar days, unless a shorter period has been agreed with EIT as part of the applicable approval or procedural review of the call. During this period, applicants are not permitted to publicly announce the outcome, even if they have already received written notification.

During the standstill period, applicants may submit an appeal in accordance with the appeal procedure described in Annex I of these call guidelines. EIT Culture & Creativity may suspend or adjust the contracting process for proposals whose funding position may be affected by an appeal or evaluation review.

Where an appeal or evaluation review results in a correction, full or partial re-evaluation, or revised ranking, EIT Culture & Creativity may update the list of selected proposals, the reserve list and/or the list of rejected proposals accordingly before any Subgrant Agreement is signed.

No Subgrant Agreement will be signed before the end of the applicable standstill period and completion of the procedural and contracting checks required before signature.

5.5 Publication of selected proposals and annual publication of recipients of funds

EIT Culture & Creativity may publish the list of selected proposals once the applicable procedural checks have been completed and the results may be communicated. The publication may include the name of the selected recipient(s), the country of establishment, the amount of EIT Culture & Creativity financial support committed, and the subject of the grant, taking into account applicable confidentiality, security and personal data protection requirements.

5.6 Appeal process

EIT Culture & Creativity will address requests for review concerning the procedural aspects of the evaluation process, in line with the Appeal Process set out in Annex I of these call guidelines.

Appeals shall be addressed to EIT Culture & Creativity at pmo@eit-culture-creativity.eu within 7 calendar days from the date of dispatch of the communication of the evaluation results.

Annex I provides full details on:

- who may appeal and on what grounds;
- the submission process and timeline;
- the internal appeal review mechanism and decision procedure.

Appeals that do not meet the specified criteria or are submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

6. Legal aspects, other terms and conditions

6.1 Acceptance of the call conditions

EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the right to make reasonable amendments and additions to the call conditions. Amendments and additions to the call conditions shall be valid only before the submission deadline, and if made available to all potential applicants at the same time on the call page of the EIT Culture & Creativity website.

EIT Culture & Creativity may declare the call unsuccessful in case no applications are received, if the applications do not meet the admissibility, eligibility, exclusion and selection criteria, or if none of the applications reach the thresholds laid down in this call text.

By submitting the application form, the applicant agrees to the present call conditions. Applicants agree that they have no legal entitlement to funding. Submission of an application does not establish any entitlement to receive financial support from EIT Culture & Creativity.

6.2 Cancellation of the call

EIT Culture & Creativity reserves the right to cancel the call at any time before the signature of the subgrant agreement(s) without the obligation to compensate applicants, in particular where its objectives can no longer be met, provided that the applicants are informed in a transparent manner in writing as follows:

- if the cancellation takes place before that award: on the call page of the EIT Culture & Creativity website: https://eit-culture-creativity.eu,
- if the cancellation takes place following the communication of the results to the applicants, during the standstill period, or any time before the signature of the subgrant agreement: in writing directly to the selected applicants.

6.3 Data protection

EIT Culture & Creativity ensures that any processing of personal data shall be performed in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (GDPR). Personal data submitted in the context of this procedure will be processed to the extent necessary for the administration, evaluation, and follow-up of the call. As a data subject, you have the right of access, the right to rectification, the right to erasure, the right to restrict processing, the right to data portability, the right to object, and the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing. If you have a question about personal data processing or want to exercise your data subject rights, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dpo@eit-culture-creativity.eu.

The collected personal data will be used solely for the evaluation of the applications and the conduct of the call process.

Personal data will be deleted 5 years after the announcement of the results of the call in case of unsuccessful applications and 7 years for successful applicants.

By submitting your application to this call, applicants acknowledge that their personal data will be processed by EIT Culture & Creativity for the purposes of the management, evaluation, monitoring and administration of the call and any resulting financial support, in accordance with the applicable data protection rules.

For more information on the processing of your personal data, please consult the privacy statement of EIT Culture & Creativity at: Code of Conduct.

6.4 Confidentiality

EIT Culture & Creativity undertakes to use any confidential information shared by the applicants solely for the purposes of the evaluation process.

Confidential information shall mean data and/or information (in any form) that is proprietary to, or possessed by, the applicants and not generally known to the public, or that has not yet been revealed whether in tangible or intangible form, that is identified as confidential in writing or when disclosed orally.

Confidential information included in the application form must be expressly labelled by the applicant as such in the form. As regards confidential information expressly labelled as such in the call process, EIT Culture & Creativity undertakes to (i) not disclose them in any way and any form, without the prior written authorisation of the applicant; and (ii) not to use them for purposes other than those strictly necessary for participation in the call.

Confidential information may be shared among EIT Culture & Creativity and its subsidiaries (e.g. KIC Co-Location Centres) solely for the purposes of the call process. EIT Culture & Creativity undertakes to impose this confidentiality obligation on its employees and the employees of its subsidiaries and its collaborators, as well as on independent experts and all subjects who, by virtue of participating in the conduct of the call, including as members of the Evaluation Committee, may have access to such confidential data and information.

The applicants agree that data and information regarding the selected projects' implementation (e.g. success stories) not labelled as confidential may be disclosed in connection with the activities of EIT Culture & Creativity.

6.5 Avoidance of conflict of interest

EIT Culture & Creativity is committed to ensure the avoidance of conflict of interest (regarding all actors) and comply with the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sound financial management.

Measures to avoid a potential Conflict of Interest or unequal treatment of applicants are ensured. They include an appropriate conflict of interest declaration and assessment process, established written communication channels and independent and fair complaints/redress procedures.

In case an applicant becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest affecting the conduct of the call process, it shall notify the EIT Culture & Creativity of the conflict of interest without any delay.

6.6 Ethics and values

The proposal must comply with:

- ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity) and
- applicable EU, international and national law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Supplementary Protocols.

No financial support/EIT funding can be granted, within or outside the EU, for activities that are prohibited in all Member States. No financial support/EIT funding can be granted in a Member State for an activity which is forbidden in that Member State.

Please refer to the Subgrant Agreement for further requirements.

6.7 Intellectual property rights

Applicants retain full and exclusive ownership of their prior information and intellectual property rights. By submitting their application, applicants affirm that they hold ownership or have legally secured the right to use all elements of the innovative product or service included in their application.

Applicants agree to indemnify and hold harmless EIT Culture & Creativity and/or any assignee or affiliate from any third-party allegations or claims of intellectual property rights infringement by the product or service of applicants. Applicants shall have the right to further develop, use and license their intellectual property rights for creating, making, marketing, and distributing products, services, and technology. Applicants agree to respect the IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) Rules (Article 16) of the General Model Grant Agreement and Article 10 of the Common Subgrant Agreement Model.

6.8 Withdrawal of the funding – Recovery of undue amounts

EIT Culture & Creativity may withdraw the funding after its award and recover all payments made in line with the provisions of the Subgrant agreement (Article 7.4.), including in the following cases:

- in case the applicant committed substantial errors, irregularities or fraud;

- in case the applicant committed serious breach of obligations under the Subgrant agreement or during its award (including non-compliance with the call conditions, submission of false information, failure to provide required information, etc.)
- it is established that the awarded applicants were not eligible or should have been excluded.

6.9 Checks, reviews, audits and investigations

EIT Culture & Creativity retains the right to initiate checks, reviews and audit on an applicant that has been awarded funding, in order to verify compliance with the requirements of the call conditions and of the legal and contractual framework referred to above.

EIT Culture & Creativity may request any information and data from applicants who have been awarded funding for 5 years after completion of the project, as well as in relation to monitoring by the EIT.

In accordance with the Grant Agreement between the EIT and the KIC as well as the Financial Support Agreement, the EIT and/or the Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the Court of Auditors may carry out checks, reviews, audits and investigations in relation to the call and the implementation of the projects.

6.10 Applicable law

The present call is governed by the applicable European Union legal framework (i.e. in particular the EIT Regulation[4], the EU Financial Regulation[5], the Horizon Europe Regulation[6]), supplemented if necessary by the national law of Belgium.

Applicants acknowledge that the present call is implemented within the framework of the Partnership Agreement and Grant Agreement concluded between the EIT and EIT Culture & Creativity, and that the applicable provisions of those agreements may be reflected in the Subgrant Agreement.

6.11 Settlement of disputes

All disputes arising out of or in connection with this Agreement, which cannot be solved amicably, shall be finally settled before the courts of Brussels.

[4] Regulation (EU) 2021/819
[5] Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509
[6] Regulation (EU) 2021/695

6.12 Other

All applicants selected for funding will be required to sign a **Declaration of Honour** in the format provided under the **Subgrant agreement**. By signing the Declaration of Honour, applicants confirm that they are not in any of the exclusion situations and that all information provided is accurate and complete.

Participation in EIT Culture & Creativity calls takes place **entirely at the applicants' own cost and risk**. Any activities undertaken by applicants to start the implementation of a project **before the Subgrant agreement is signed** are carried out at their own cost and risk. EIT Culture & Creativity shall not be held liable for any actions or costs incurred prior to the signature of the Financial Support Agreement.

EIT Culture & Creativity does **not undertake any commitment** regarding the provision of financial support until the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has confirmed the eligibility of the selected projects and the **Subgrant agreement has been duly signed**. All financial support is subject to the **cost eligibility rules** laid down in the Subgrant agreement and to the **final confirmation of cost eligibility by the EIT**.

Entities that have never been part of projects financially supported by EIT Culture & Creativity and that do not yet have a **validated Participant Identification Code (PIC)** will be subject to a **PIC validation process**. This process is managed through the EIT Community Onboarding Service in cooperation with the European Commission's Research Executive Agency (REA), and successful validation is a precondition for the signature of the Financial Support Agreement.

Annex I – Appeal process

EIT Culture & Creativity will address any complaints concerning the conduct and the outcome of the call process.

Complaints shall be addressed to pmo@eit-culture-creativity.eu within 7 calendar days from the date of communication of the results of the evaluation.

1. Right to appeal

Only the lead applicant of a submitted proposal is entitled to file an appeal.

2. Grounds for appeal

Only the procedural aspects of an evaluation may be the subject of a request for an evaluation review. The evaluation of the merits of a proposal shall not be subject to appeal.

Appeals may be lodged only where the applicant considers that the applicable evaluation procedure was not correctly applied to its proposal, including procedural errors, technical or administrative errors, or manifest factual errors that may have materially affected the evaluation outcome.

Disagreement with the judgement or scores awarded by the evaluators or Selection Committee does not in itself constitute grounds for appeal.

3. Appeal submission procedure

The appeal must be submitted via email to **pmo@eit-culture-creativity.eu within 7 calendar days** of receiving the official evaluation result notification. Late submissions will not be considered.

The appeal must include the following mandatory information:

- name and address of the lead applicant and, where applicable, the name of the applicant team;
- name and contact details of the person submitting the appeal;
- acronym or title of the proposal;
- clearly stated grounds for appeal, as defined in Section 2 of this annex; and
- any relevant supporting documents.

EIT Culture & Creativity will acknowledge receipt of the appeal in writing. Appeals submitted without the required information or based on ineligible grounds will be rejected.

4. Grounds for automatic rejection

An appeal will be automatically rejected if:

- It is submitted after the deadline;
- It is based on grounds not listed in Section 2 of this annex;
- It does not include all mandatory information listed in Section 3 of this annex.

In such cases, the PMO will notify the project applicant within **15 calendar days** of receiving the appeal.

5. Internal appeal evaluation process

EIT Culture & Creativity will coordinate the appeal process and conduct a technical examination of the appeal, assessing whether it falls within the admissible grounds and compiling the relevant documentation. The documentation will then be forwarded to the Appeal Panel for review.

The Appeal Panel does not re-evaluate proposals. Its role is to assess the validity of the appeal, ensuring that the applicable procedures were correctly followed and that no procedural or factual errors occurred that could have materially affected the evaluation outcome.

6. Composition and function of the Appeal Panel

The Appeal Panel shall be composed of **two voting members appointed by the CEO of EIT Culture & Creativity**:

- the COO of EIT Culture & Creativity, provided that they were not involved in the evaluation or selection of the proposal concerned; and
- one Legal Counsel or legal representative of EIT Culture & Creativity, provided that they were not involved in the evaluation or selection of the proposal concerned.

The Appeal Panel shall be chaired by the COO of EIT Culture & Creativity, unless the COO is unavailable or has a conflict of interest, in which case the CEO may appoint another impartial chair.

The CEO may appoint additional voting or non-voting members where needed, taking into account the nature of the appeal, the need for additional procedural, legal, technical or thematic expertise, or the need to avoid a conflict of interest or deadlock.

All Appeal Panel members must be free from any conflict of interest and must not have been involved in the evaluation or selection of the proposal concerned. If a conflict arises, the member will not participate in the review and the CEO may appoint a replacement.

7. Appeal Panel process

The Appeal Panel will review the appeal and the relevant documentation to assess whether the appeal falls within the admissible grounds defined in this Annex and whether the identified issue may have materially affected the evaluation outcome.

The Appeal Panel will issue an internal opinion and recommendation to EIT Culture & Creativity. Based on this opinion and recommendation, EIT Culture & Creativity may confirm the initial evaluation or decide on a full or partial re-evaluation, primarily by evaluators who were not involved in the previous evaluation.

The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the lead applicant in writing. Internal reports and deliberations will not be shared with applicants.

8. Timeline and outcome notification

The lead applicant will receive a formal reply to the appeal within **15 calendar days from the expiry of the appeal submission deadline**, provided that the appeal is admissible and contains all mandatory information required under Section 3.

If this timeline cannot be met due to exceptional circumstances, EIT Culture & Creativity will inform the lead applicant accordingly.

All appeal-related communication will be conducted exclusively with the lead applicant.

9. Non-suspensive effect of appeals

The submission of an appeal does not suspend, interrupt or otherwise affect the evaluation, selection or contracting process in respect of proposals not subject to that appeal.

Where the funding position of another proposal may be affected by the outcome of an appeal, EIT Culture & Creativity may suspend or adjust the relevant contracting process until the appeal has been resolved.

10. Finality of the appeal process

Based on the opinion and recommendation of the Appeal Panel, EIT Culture & Creativity will take the final decision on the appeal and notify the lead applicant in writing.

The decision of EIT Culture & Creativity is final within the framework of the internal appeal procedure described in this Annex. No further appeals will be accepted on the same grounds for the same proposal. This is without prejudice to any external legal remedies that may be available under applicable law.

Annex II – Online application form

Thank you for your interest in our call. We look forward to reviewing your application. Ready to begin? Click "Start my application."

Submission is via the online platform only.

Before starting, please make sure to read the call guidelines and all related documents.

A few things to note

- Please fill out all sections in English – incomplete applications can't be considered.
- Please note, 500MB is the maximum file size for each uploaded item. If a file is larger than 500MB, create a zip file and upload the zip file instead.
- Use templates where provided, e.g. budget file template.
- Part B of the online application (Annex III) form should be submitted as separate pdf file. The template can be found in Annex III of call guidelines.

Saving your draft application

- Draft mode: You can save your application as a draft and return later. Important: Save the link - we can't recover it for you!
- Submitted but not final? Don't worry. You can still edit your application after submission. Save the link - we can't recover it for you!

PART A – PROPOSAL IDENTIFICATION AND APPLICANT INFORMATION

APPLICATION INFORMATION

- Proposal title
  Enter the full title of your proposal.
- Proposal acronym
  Enter a short acronym. This will be used as the project identifier throughout the process.
  For example: "GREENLAB" for an idea titled "Green Solutions for Urban Laboratories".
- Priority area
  Select the EIT Culture & Creativity priority area that best fits your business idea. This must remain throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2. This helps us match your application with the right evaluators.
  - Architecture
  - Fashion
- Applicant type
  Please choose the type of applicant. For guidance:
  ***Individual** - applying as natural person, not incorporated, solo founder of your business idea;*

Team representative *- applying as representative of designated team on behalf of business idea founders, business idea is not incorporated.*

- Individual
- Team representative

Applicant type – Individual

INDIVIDUAL INFORMATION

- Individual - First name
- Individual - Last name
- Individual - Title or salutation
  Select the title and/or salutation.
  - Ms
  - Mr
  - Mx
  - Dr
  - Prof
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other. If you have selected "Other", please specify
- Individual - Gender
  This information is for statistical and reporting purposes only.
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary
  - Prefer not to say
- Individual - Email address
  This email will be used for all official notifications including the evaluation result.
- Individual - Telephone number
- Individual - Country
- Individual - Country code
  Enter the two-letter country code corresponding to the country of legal establishment. For more information, see Country codes - Statistics Explained - Eurostat.
  For example: ES, DE, FR, IT.
- Individual - City
- Individual - Street
- Individual - Street number
- Individual - Postal code
- Individual - PO Box, if applicable
  If not applicable, please write "Not applicable". A Post Office Box (PO Box) is a lockable mailbox located at a post office, used as an alternative delivery address.
- Individual - RIS country

Indicate whether the applicant is established in an EIT RIS-eligible country. For more information, see https://eit-ris.eu/about-eit-community/.

- Yes
- No
- To be verified

- **If selected, will you require a visa to travel within Europe or the UK?**
  Your answer will NOT affect the selection process. This information is collected only to help us plan timelines in case of selection.
  - Yes
  - No
- **Business idea website**
  Provide a link if applicable.
  This could be for example your website, Notion, Behance, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.

Applicant type – Team representative

Team representative information

- **Team representative - First name**
- **Team representative - Last name**
- **Team representative - Title or salutation**
  Select the title and/or salutation.
  - Ms
  - Mr
  - Mx
  - Dr
  - Prof
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other. If you have selected "Other", please specify.
- **Team representative - Gender**
  This information is for statistical and reporting purposes only.
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary
  - Prefer not to say
- **Team representative - Email address**
  This email will be used for all official notifications including the evaluation result.
- **Team representative - Telephone number**
- **Team representative - Country**
- **Team representative - Country code**
  Enter the two-letter country code corresponding to the country of legal establishment. For more information, see Country codes - Statistics Explained - Eurostat.

For example: ES, DE, FR, IT.

- Team representative - City
- Team representative - Postal code
- Team representative - Street
- Team representative - Street number
- Team representative - PO Box, if applicable
  Enter the PO Box of Team representative., if applicable. If not applicable, please write "Not applicable".
- Team representative - RIS country
  Indicate whether the applicant is established in an EIT RIS-eligible country. For more information, see https://eit-ris.eu/about-eit-community/.
  - Yes
  - No
  - To be verified
- How many founders does your business idea currently have?
  Enter full name and listed details of each founder of your business idea in form of list using structure below:
  Founder 1: Full name, gender, Email address, role
  Founder 2: Full name, gender, Email address, role
  Founder 3: Full name, gender, Email address, role
  ...
  Duplicate as many founders as needed.
- If selected, will you or any founder of your business idea require a visa to travel within Europe or the UK?
  Your answer will NOT affect the selection process. This information is collected only to help us plan timelines in case of selection.
  - Yes
  - No
- Business idea website
  Provide a link if applicable.
  This could be for example your website, Notion, Behance, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.

MANDATORY DOCUMENT UPLOADS

- Budget file
  Upload the completed budget file saved as xlsx file showing how you plan to allocate the EUR 30,000 financial support.
  ***Important**: The financial section is completed using the EIT Culture & Creativity funding template provided.*
  ***File name:** Budget_proposal acronym.xlsx*

- Venture Execution Plan
  Upload the completed Venture Execution Plan outline described below as a single document in pdf format (max. 7 pages including budget plan by exporting the budget templates you filled for Phase 1 and Phase 2 and merging with this pdf).
  This document will support understanding your venture idea, what you aim to explore, validate, build, improve, or formalise during the 9-month Spark Incubation Programme, and how you plan to use the requested funding to support your venture creation journey. As Spark is designed for early-stage founders and business concepts, we encourage you to focus on your current assumptions, priorities, early validation efforts, development goals, and next steps toward building a viable venture. Please structure your document according to the sections outlined in the template and ensure all requested information is included.
  ***Important**: If selected, this document will also serve as a working roadmap throughout the programme and will be further developed during the Startup Sprint and throughout the Spark Incubation Programme.*
  ***File name:** Execution Plan_ proposal acronym.pdf*
- Lean Startup Canvas
  Upload completed Lean Startup Canvas file in pdf format. Applicants may use the template provided in the Call Guideline or complete their Lean Startup Canvas using digital tools such as Canva or Miro (free accounts are sufficient); the choice of tool or platform used to prepare it is not restricted.
  - *Via Canva: https://www.canva.com/online-whiteboard/lean-canvas/*
  - *Via Miro: https://miro.com/strategic-planning/what-is-lean-canvas/*

  ***File name:** LSC_ proposal acronym.pdf*
- Pitch video
  Upload a 1-minute pitch video (YouTube or Vimeo) to introduce yourself (and your team if you apply as a Team representative) and your business idea. Please add subtitles in English. Consider this video will be shared with the evaluators to help them understand your solution, your goals and your achievements. This is a pitch video, not a promotional one.
  The link must be publicly accessible.
- Evidence of your business idea and/or prototype
  Provide one link with a tangible evidence of your business idea and/or prototype. The link may include demo video, screenshots, mock-ups, pilot documentation or link to a working solution.
  The link must be publicly accessible.

☐ SANCTIONS & JURISDICTION SCREENING (Individuals only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that the applicant, its shareholders, UBOs and controlling persons are not subject to EU restrictive measures that would prevent participation in or receipt of funding under this call, and that the applicant does not fall under any country, ownership or control restriction set out in Section 2.2.2 of the Call Guidelines and the applicable EU restrictive measures.

☐ LEGAL & DISPUTE HISTORY (Individuals only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that the applicant has not been involved in, and is not aware of, any legal, regulatory, arbitration, criminal, civil, or other dispute proceedings, investigations, or material claims.

☐ LEGAL DECLARATIONS (Individuals only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *The applicant has read and accepts the rules and conditions of the call.*
- *The applicant will not receive double funding for the same activities.*
- *I understand that all programme activities are delivered in English, and I confirm I am proficient in the language. I recognise that insufficient proficiency could limit my ability to fully benefit from the programme.*

☐ FINANCIAL CAPACITY (Individuals only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *The applicant has the financial capacity required to implement the proposal.*
- *The applicant acknowledges that EIT Culture & Creativity may request information or supporting documents to verify financial capacity, including financial statements, business plans, audit reports, information on dependency on EU funding, previous financial performance or any other document reasonably required for this assessment.*
- *The applicant understands that failure to provide requested information, or the submission of false, incomplete or misleading information, may result in rejection of the proposal, withdrawal of the award decision, termination of the contracting process or agreement, and/or recovery of funds, where applicable.*

☐ OPERATIONAL CAPACITY (Individuals only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *The applicant has the operational capacity required to implement the proposal.*
- *The applicant has the necessary experience, know-how and qualifications to carry out the proposed activities, fulfil their role in the project, and comply with the reporting, monitoring and contractual obligations of the call.*
- *The applicant acknowledges that EIT Culture & Creativity may request information or supporting documents to verify operational capacity, including applicant profile, applicant information, technical resources, relevant experience, ongoing commitments or any other document reasonably required for this assessment.*
- *The applicant understands that failure to provide requested information, or the submission of false, incomplete or misleading information, may result in rejection of the proposal, withdrawal of the award decision, termination of the contracting process or agreement, and/or recovery of funds, where applicable.*

☐ SANCTIONS & JURISDICTION SCREENING (Teams only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that the applicant and designated team founders, its shareholders, UBOs and controlling persons are not subject to EU restrictive measures that would prevent participation in or receipt of funding under this call, and that the applicant and designated team founders, do not fall under any country, ownership or control restriction set out in Section 2.2.2 of the Call Guidelines and the applicable EU restrictive measures.

☐ LEGAL & DISPUTE HISTORY (Teams only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that applicant and designated team founders have not been involved in, and are not aware of, any legal, regulatory, arbitration, criminal, civil, or other dispute proceedings, investigations, or material claims.

☐ LEGAL DECLARATIONS (Teams only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *I am authorised to submit this application on behalf of the designated team.*
- *The applicant and designated team founders have read and accept the rules and conditions of the call.*
- *The applicant, including all designated team founders, will not receive double funding for the same activities.*
- *I understand that all programme activities are delivered in English, and I confirm that at least one of the founders is proficient in the language. I recognise that insufficient proficiency could limit our ability to fully benefit from the programme.*

☐ FINANCIAL CAPACITY (Teams only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *The applicant and designated team founders have the financial capacity required to implement the proposal.*
- *The applicant and designated team founders acknowledge that EIT Culture & Creativity may request information or supporting documents to verify financial capacity, including financial statements, business plans, audit reports, information on dependency on EU funding, previous financial performance or any other document reasonably required for this assessment.*
- *The applicant and designated team founders understand that failure to provide requested information, or the submission of false, incomplete or misleading information, may result in rejection of the proposal, withdrawal of the award decision, termination of the contracting process or agreement, and/or recovery of funds, where applicable.*

☐ OPERATIONAL CAPACITY (Teams only)

By ticking this box, I confirm that:

- *The applicant and designated team founders have the operational capacity required to implement the proposal.*
- *The applicant, including designated team founders, have the necessary experience, know-how, qualifications, staff, organisational capacity and operational resources to carry out the proposed activities, fulfil their role in the project, and comply with the reporting, monitoring and contractual obligations of the call.*
- *The applicant and designated team founders acknowledge that EIT Culture & Creativity may request information or supporting documents to verify operational capacity, including team profiles, allocation of responsibilities, staffing information, technical resources, relevant experience, ongoing commitments or any other document reasonably required for this assessment.*
- *The applicant and designated team founders understand that failure to provide requested information, or the submission of false, incomplete or misleading information, may result in rejection of the proposal, withdrawal of the award decision, termination of the contracting process or agreement, and/or recovery of funds, where applicable.*

PART B – TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

Part B is the technical part of the application. It will be assessed together with the budget file and required annexes, against the award criteria defined in the call guidelines.

Applicants should provide clear, concise and evidence-based answers. The information provided in Part B must be consistent with Part A, the budget file and required annexes.

- Upload Part B of the online application form
  Upload complete Part B (Annex III). You can find the template in ***Annex III*** *of call guidelines.*
  Save the file in pdf format. Keep the character limit for each question.
  Make sure questions marked as Individuals only / Teams only correspond to your answer in Part A question "Applicant type".
  File name: *Part B_proposal acronym.pdf*

OTHER

What is your expectation from the Spark Incubation Programme? (up to 2,000 characters)

Why have you decided to you apply and what do you want to achieve?

How did you hear about this call?

Select all that apply.

- *EIT Culture and Creativity Email Newsletter*
- *Social Media (e.g. Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn)*
- *Media (e.g. news, websites, magazines)*
- *Referral by friend of EIT Culture and Creativity (e.g. alumni, mentor, investor, etc.)*
  If you have selected "Referral by friend of EIT Culture and Creativity", please specify
- *Other*
  If you have selected "Other", please specify

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

- Full name of person submitting
- Confirmation of completeness and accuracy
  ☐ *By ticking this box, I confirm that all information provided in Part B is true, complete, accurate and consistent with Part A and all mandatory annexes.*
- Confirmation of readiness for evaluation
  ☐ *By ticking this box, I confirm that the proposal is ready for evaluation and that all required sections and supporting documents have been completed and submitted.*

Annex III – Part B of the online application form

Open call for New Ventures in Creative Tech (Spark)

Part B of the online application form template

Part B is the technical part of the application. It will be assessed together with the budget file and required annexes, against the award criteria defined in the call guidelines.

Applicants should provide clear, concise and evidence-based answers. The information provided in Part B must be consistent with Part A, the budget file and required annexes.

Important notes:

- **Fill the text boxes only. Do not change the structure of questions.**
- Please keep the character limit for each question.
- Make sure that questions marked as Individuals only / Teams only correspond to your answer question "*Applicant type*" in Part A of the online application form.

Once Part B is completed:

- Save the file in pdf format,
- Name the file *Part B_proposal acronym.pdf*, and
- Upload completed Part B together with your application form via online platform.

PART B – TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

Proposal abstract (up to 1,000 characters)

Provide a short summary of the business idea, including:

- *The proposed solution, activity, programme, service or intervention.*
- *The main objectives.*
- *The target groups, users, beneficiaries or markets.*
- *The expected outcomes and results.*
- *The expected contribution to EIT Culture & Creativity's objectives.*

Keep your answer short and clear. Answer directly and avoid unnecessary jargon.

Type your answer here

EXCELLENCE (CRITERION A)

A1 Problem & Solution Clarity

Clarity and relevance of the problem addressed and coherence of the proposed business idea.

Describe what your business idea is (up to 500 characters)

Share your solution's purpose, process, and significance clearly and avoid buzzwords.
Please consider this is the description that will be seen by evaluators.

Type your answer here

Provide a one-sentence description of your business idea (up to 500 characters)

Use the structure below to describe your business idea:
"We help [Target Customer] who [Problem/Need] to [Desired Outcome] through our [Product/Service], which [Unique Benefit or Differentiation]."
***Example**: We help cultural organisations who struggle to engage younger audiences to create immersive experiences through our XR platform, which transforms archives into interactive storytelling."*

Type your answer here

A2 Innovation & Differentiation

Degree of novelty, originality, or meaningful differentiation of the business idea.

What do you understand about your business that others don't? (up to 500 characters)

Keep your answer short and clear. Answer directly and avoid unnecessary jargon.

Type your answer here

Describe your product or service, its core functionality, and the unique value it offers compared to existing solutions in the market (up to 500 characters)

Keep your answer short and clear. Answer directly and avoid unnecessary jargon.

Type your answer here

A3 Gender mainstreaming and the integration of the gender dimension

EIT Culture & Creativity is committed to gender equality, diversity and inclusion (GEDI). Applicants must demonstrate how GEDI considerations are meaningfully embedded throughout the design, development and implementation of project outputs, using an intersectional perspective where relevant

Describe how you have considered gender equality, diversity and inclusion in developing your business idea (up to 2000 characters)

Where relevant, explain whether and how these considerations affect:

- *the problem or need you are addressing;*
- *your target users, customers or beneficiaries;*
- *the design, functionality or accessibility of your product/service;*
- *how you will test or validate your solution; and/or*
- *the expected outcomes or impact of your venture.*

If these considerations are not relevant to your venture, explain why.

Type your answer here

IMPACT (CRITERION B)

Relevance to CCSI & Use of Technology (up to 1000 characters)

Explain briefly a clear connection between your business idea and the priority area (Fashion or Architecture) you have choose in Part A of this application form. Avoid vague answer, show potential that aligns with CCSI's mission. Keep your answer short and clear. Answer directly and avoid unnecessary jargon.

Type your answer here

QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION (CRITERION C)

C1 Commercial logic and business idea viability

Early understanding of how the business idea could create and capture value as a for profit, scalable, tech centric business (digital, hardware, or material innovation). Revenues and pricing are not required.

Have you previously received any external financial support such as investment, grant? (up to 500 characters)

If yes, please elaborate from where, how much and the purpose of the support.
If no, please write "non applicable".

Type your answer here

Who are your top 3 competitors? (up to 2,000 characters)

Please use the structure below to describe your competitors:
Competitor 1: Full legal name, Website;
Competitor 2: Full legal name, Website;
Competitor 3: Full legal name, Website.

Type your answer here

Do you have paying customers? (up to 2,000 characters)

If yes, please upload one link that provides evidence. The link may include one or more following:

- *Customer list (can be anonymised);*

- *Signed contracts;*
- *Invoices.*

If you do not have paying customers, please indicate "non applicable".

Type your answer here

What is your revenue model? How do you currently generate or plan to generate income? (up to 2,000 characters)

Type your answer here

C2 Capability & Commitment

Skills, motivation, domain understanding, and commitment of the founder(s) to venture creation.

How many people are currently in the team? (up to 2,000 characters)

Describe the core team roles (including founders) and add their LinkedIn profiles in form of list using structure below:

Team member 1: Full name, role in team, LinkedIn profile;

Team member 2: Full name, role in team, LinkedIn profile;

Team member 3: Full name, role in team, LinkedIn profile;

...

Duplicate as many team members as needed.

Type your answer here

Share your team member(s) own websites, portfolio sites, if applicable (up to 2,000 characters)

Share your team member(s) (including founders) own websites and/or portfolio sites in form of list using structure below:

Team member 1: Full name, role in team, website/portfolio site

Team member 2: Full name, role in team, website/portfolio site

Team member 3: Full name, role in team, website/portfolio site

...

Duplicate as many team members as needed.

Type your answer here

Are you looking for a co-founder? (up to 2,000 characters)

If yes, describe the expertise you are looking for. If no, please include "non applicable".

Type your answer here

What is your weekly current time commitment in total? (up to 200 characters) - Individuals only

Please indicate ***the total hour commitment per week.***

Example:

- *Less than 10 hours*
- *20–30 hours*
- *Full time*

We expect selected Individual to commit a minimum of 10–15 hours per week to programme-related activities, such as participating in trainings, completing assignments, and developing their venture.

Please keep in mind that this programme is designed for early founders who are serious about building and growing their business.

Type your answer here

What is the weekly current time commitment of your team in total? (up to 200 characters) - Teams only

Please indicate ***the total hour commitment per week.***

- *Less than 10 hours*
- *20–30 hours*
- *Full time*

At least one founder must individually commit the required 10–15 hours/week to programme-related activities, such as participating in trainings, completing assignments, and developing their venture.

Please keep in mind that this programme is designed for early founders who are serious about building and growing their business.

Type your answer here

Relevant experience related to your business idea (up to 2,000 characters) - Individuals only

Applicant should have a minimum of 1 year of relevant experience related to business idea. Please include in your answer all that apply.

- *Education or formal training in the domain*
- *Applied research (for example PhD or research projects)*
- *Professional practice or industry experience.*
- *Participation in a university incubation or entrepreneurship programme.*
- *Other*
- *No relevant experience*

For each selected option, please explain briefly.

Type your answer here

Relevant experience related to your business idea – team founder 1 (up to 2,000 characters) - Teams only

At least one founder should have a minimum of 1 year of relevant experience related to your business idea listed below. Please include in your answer all that apply.

- *Education or formal training in the domain*
- *Applied research (for example PhD or research projects)*
- *Professional practice or industry experience.*
- *Participation in a university incubation or entrepreneurship programme.*
- *Other*
- *No relevant experience*

For each selected option, please explain briefly.

Type your answer here

Relevant experience related to your business idea – team founder 2 (up to 2,000 characters) - Teams only

At least one founder should have a minimum of 1 year of relevant experience related to your business idea listed below. Please include in your answer all that apply.

- *Education or formal training in the domain*
- *Applied research (for example PhD or research projects)*
- *Professional practice or industry experience.*
- *Participation in a university incubation or entrepreneurship programme.*

- *Other*
- *No relevant experience*

For each selected option, please explain briefly.

Type your answer here

Relevant experience related to your business idea – team founder 3 (up to 2,000 characters) - Teams only

Please fill this part only if you have more than 2 founders in your team.
At least one founder should have a minimum of 1 year of relevant experience related to your business idea listed below. Please include in your answer all that apply.

- *Education or formal training in the domain*
- *Applied research (for example PhD or research projects)*
- *Professional practice or industry experience.*
- *Participation in a university incubation or entrepreneurship programme.*
- *Other*
- *No relevant experience*

For each selected option, please explain briefly.

Type your answer here

What do you do for living right now? (up to 2,000 characters) - Individuals only

Please share the name of the company/initiative you are currently working in, website of the company/initiative, and your role.

Type your answer here

What do team founders do for living right now? (up to 2,000 characters) - Teams only

Please share the name of founder, name of the company/initiative they are currently working in, website of the company/initiative, and their role. Use the structure below:
Team founder 1: Full name, name of company/initiative, website of company/initiative, role within company/initiative;

Team founder 2: Full name, name of company/initiative, website of company/initiative, role within company/initiative;
Team founder 3: Full name, name of company/initiative, website of company/initiative, role within company/initiative;
…
Duplicate as many team/venture founders as needed.

Type your answer here

Describe current stage of your business idea and/or prototype development (up to 2,000 characters)
Describe what kind of tests and prototypes you already done and share the insights or learnings gathered so far.

Type your answer here

C5 Entrepreneurial Spirit & Experience
Evidence of the engagement with entrepreneurship, including prior participation in startup programmes, venture-building activities, or relevant initiatives, demonstrating motivation, commitment, and readiness to develop a venture.

Do you have experience with creating commercially successful startups/ventures? (up to 2,000 characters) - Individuals only
If yes, please:

- *Describe briefly the startup/venture and your role in it.*
- *If available, share a website, portfolio, LinkedIn, or any relevant public link, (the link must be publicly accessible)*
- *If available, provide brief commercial indicators or proof of traction from this previous venture by providing a link with examples. The link may include revenue generated, paying customers, partnerships or pilots, users or audience growth, funding raised, acquisition or exit, investment raised, awards, or other relevant achievements (the link must be publicly accessible).*

If you do not have any experience, please respond with "non applicable".

Type your answer here

Do you or any of your team founder have experience creating commercially successful startups? (up to 2,000 characters) - Teams only

If yes, please:

- *Describe briefly the startups/ventures and team founders role in it*
- *If available, share websites, portfolios, LinkedIn, or any relevant public links (links must be publicly accessible)*
- *If applicable, provide brief commercial indicators or proof of traction from previous ventures. Links may include revenue generated, paying customers, partnerships or pilots, users or audience growth, funding raised, acquisition or exit, investment raised, awards, or other relevant achievements (links must be publicly accessible).*

If you or any of your team founder do not have any experience, please respond with "non applicable".

Type your answer here

Have you previously participated in, or committed to participate in, an incubator, accelerator, or entrepreneurship programme? (up to 2,000 characters)

If yes, please provide briefly details on your participation in any entrepreneurship-related programmes or activities. If available, upload one link including evidence. This may include certificates, links, programme names, references (link must be publicly accessible).

If you have not participated in any of the activities, please respond with "non applicable".

Type your answer here

What are the key milestones of your business idea? When did you begin working on it, and what progress have you made so far? (up to 2,000 characters)

For example, have you sold or patented a product or solution, launched a beta version, received awards, or secured your first grant?

Please provide brief details using structure below:

Month/year - achievement

Month/year - achievement

Month/year – achievement

…

Duplicate as many milestones as needed.

Type your answer here

What inspired you to pursue this idea? What is your core motivation, and how have you validated the demand for your product or service? (up to 2,000 characters)

Type your answer here

Annex IV – Programme Initiatives and Activities

1. Programme initiatives and activities

This Annex provides an overview of the main initiatives, support services, and activities delivered through the Spark Incubation Programme. This 9-month online incubation journey supports early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs in transforming validated ideas into formally established ventures. The Programme begins with a 2–3 day in-person Startup Sprint, where emerging founders validate the problem they aim to solve; through hands-on workshops, expert feedback, rapid prototyping, field research, and pitch sessions, participants test the relevance and potential of their business ideas. Overall, the programme combines financial support with tailored venture creation services — including structured training, mentorship, business model development, company formation support, and access to the EIT Culture & Creativity ecosystem — designed to respond to the challenges and needs of idea-stage creative tech initiatives.

The activities described below are indicative and may be adapted based on cohort needs, market developments, and programme priorities.

Please note that the exact sequencing, delivery format, and content of activities may evolve over time. EIT Culture and Creativity reserves the right to adapt programme components in order to respond to participant needs, market developments, operational considerations, and strategic priorities.

2. Spark Incubation Programme

Component	Description
Startup Sprint	Startup Sprints are short, high-intensity, 2–3-day bootcamps designed to help early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs validate the problem they aim to solve. Through hands-on workshops, expert feedback, rapid prototyping, field research, and pitch sessions, participants test the relevance and potential of their business ideas.
Online Sessions	A structured series of practical working sessions and capability building workshops aligned with venture creation journey. Participants work directly on their business challenges and receive focused feedback for immediate implementation.
Designated Coach	Each venture is matched with a dedicated coach for one-to-one sessions throughout the programme. Coaches help ventures track progress, challenge assumptions, refine priorities, and maintain momentum.
Mentor Pool Access	Participants receive access to a curated international network of experts through one to one mentoring sessions on topics such as market expansion, branding, product development, fundraising, and growth strategy.
Community	A mix of expert led and peer to peer sessions designed to strengthen collaboration and shared learning. This includes founder talks, investor sessions, peer circles, and access to an online community for continuous exchange and support.

Component	Description
Pitching and Storytelling Training	Professional support to help emerging ventures build their story and pitch narrative, strengthen pitching skills, sharpen messaging, and communicate their value proposition with clarity and impact.
Visibility and Positioning	Ventures benefit from curated opportunities to strengthen market visibility and credibility across the European creative technology ecosystem. This may include participation in flagship events, showcases, speaking opportunities, interviews and ecosystem communications.
Closing Event	An online event to facilitate market entry for the newly created ventures, share the progress made over the programme timeline and make new connections.

Annex V – Eligibility of Expenditure

This Annex sets out the main principles governing the eligibility of expenditure financed through the financial support awarded under this call. It provides guidance to selected ventures on the acceptable use of funds and the conditions under which use of funds will be validated, in line with the actual-cost reimbursement model applied.

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.

Beneficiaries are required to provide evidence that the financial support has been used for the purposes approved during the programme by deliverables listed in this call guidelines (one per cohort), in line with the eligibility principles and expenditure categories defined in this Annex.

In this context, EIT Culture & Creativity applies indicative eligibility benchmarks to guide the assessment of whether the proposed and implemented use of funds is reasonable, proportionate, and aligned with programme objectives.

1. General Principles of Eligibility

To be considered eligible, expenditure must meet all the following conditions:

- Be directly linked to the objectives, activities and execution plan approved during the programme Startup Sprint;
- Be necessary and proportionate for the implementation of planned venture execution activities;
- Be incurred during the official eligibility period defined in the subgrant agreement;
- Be identifiable and verifiable, recorded in the beneficiary's accounts in accordance with the applicable accounting standards and supported by appropriate documentation;
- Be reasonable, justified, and compliant with sound financial management principles;
- Comply with applicable tax, labour, procurement, and legal obligations. EIT Culture and Creativity reserves the right to assess whether expenditure is necessary, proportionate, and sufficiently linked to programme objectives.

EIT Culture and Creativity reserves the right to assess whether expenditure is necessary, proportionate, and sufficiently linked to programme objectives.

For the period preceding the effective contractual transition at Month 3, eligible costs must be incurred and documented by the initial recipient under the initial Subgrant Agreement. From the effective date of the transition, eligible costs must be incurred, recorded and documented by the newly incorporated company. Costs may not be declared by both recipients or transferred between reporting periods solely for the purpose of eligibility.

2. Evidence and Use-of-Funds Validation

As financial support is provided under an actual-cost reimbursement model, beneficiaries must maintain complete, accurate and verifiable accounting records and supporting documentation for the costs declared.

Supporting documentation may include, as applicable, employment contracts, payroll records, timesheets or equivalent time-recording documents, invoices, contracts, procurement records, proof of payment travel documentation, accounting extracts and any other evidence required under the relevant Subgrant Agreement.

The information submitted at Month 3 is used for programme monitoring and internal verification and does not in itself constitute acceptance of actual eligible costs. Actual eligible costs incurred by the initial recipient and by the newly incorporated company will be reported and assessed in accordance with the applicable reporting period(s) and contractual arrangements established in the relevant Subgrant Agreement(s). EIT Culture & Creativity may request supporting documentation and carry out checks, reviews or audits to verify that the costs declared were actually incurred, are identifiable and verifiable in the beneficiary's accounts, relate to the approved activities and comply with the applicable eligibility conditions.

In addition to the financial supporting documentation, EIT Culture & Creativity may request proportionate evidence that the corresponding activities were implemented, such as deliverable outputs, proof of participation in relevant events, campaign or dissemination materials, deployment evidence, or other documentation demonstrating implementation of the approved activities.

3. Eligible Expenditure

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 programme.

3.1 CATEGORY-LEVEL ELIGIBILITY CAP CEILINGS

The following maximum eligibility ceilings apply per expenditure category. They represent upper limits, not expected allocations, and do not imply entitlement. The maximum eligible ceiling has to be considered over a period of nine months.

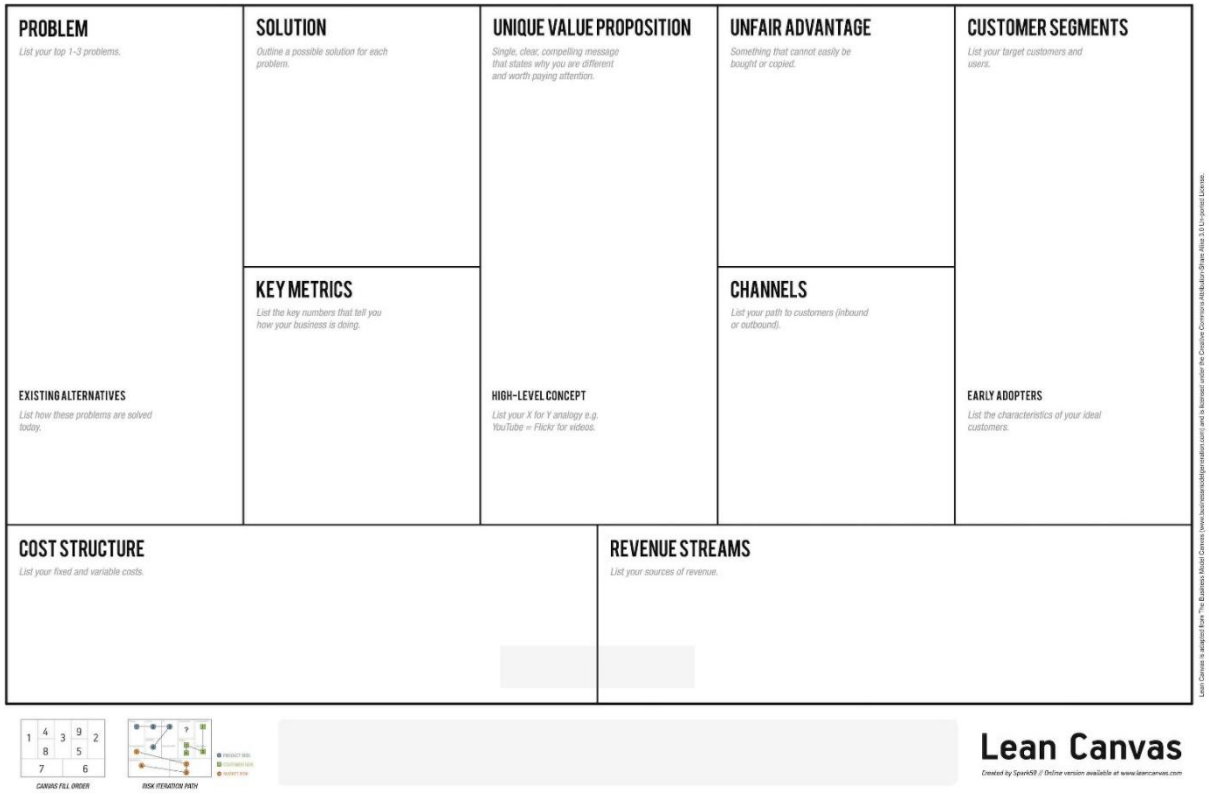
Cost Category	Max. eligible ceiling
Personnel	Up to EUR 15,000
Travel and Subsistence	Up to EUR 7,500
Subcontracting	Up to EUR 5,000 and, in any case, no more than 15% of the total eligible project costs
Cost of other goods and services	Up to EUR 7,500

The category-level ceilings are independent maximum eligibility limits and do not increase the overall maximum EIT Culture & Creativity contribution of EUR 30,000 per selected project. The maximum contribution of EUR 30,000 includes both eligible direct costs and the applicable indirect costs. Indirect costs are calculated at a flat rate of 25% of the eligible direct costs included in the calculation base under Article 6 of the applicable Subgrant Agreement and are not additional to the EUR 30,000 maximum.

Accordingly, the sum of eligible direct and indirect costs may not exceed EUR 30,000 per selected project. The reimbursement rate under this call is 100%; therefore, the total eligible project costs declared in the project budget shall correspond to the EIT Culture & Creativity contribution requested..

Example: if EUR 24,000 of eligible direct costs are included in the indirect-cost calculation base, the corresponding indirect costs would amount to EUR 6,000, resulting in a total eligible EIT Culture & Creativity contribution of EUR 30,000.

Annex VI – Lean Startup Canvas

Applicants may use the template provided below or complete their Lean Business Canvas using digital tools such as Canva or Miro (free accounts are sufficient). EIT Culture & Creativity requires applicants to upload a completed Lean Business Canvas; the choice of tool or platform used to prepare it is not restricted.

- Via Canva: https://www.canva.com/online-whiteboard/lean-canvas/
- Via Miro: https://miro.com/strategic-planning/what-is-lean-canvas/