EIT Culture & Creativity

Co-funded by the European Union

Open call for proposals New Ventures in Creative Tech (Spark) Frequently Asked Questions

EIT Culture & Creativity

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

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Document History

Version 1.0 (2026)

Changelog

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	28/20/2026	Initial version
2.0	12/11/2026	Additional questions added

1. General questions

Question 1.1 What is the main difference between the New Ventures in Creative Tech (Spark) call and Financial Support to Startups and Scaleups (Shape & Scale) call?

This call is designed **for early-stage createch founders and teams** who have NO registered company, while the Financial Support to Startups and Scaleups (Shape & Scale Programs) is for established companies in the process of investment readiness and international expansion.

Question 1.2 Do you only accept digital solutions, or can other types of innovation be submitted?

Yes, other types of solutions are welcome. We focus on innovations that can include digital, technological, business model innovation, and more. We especially encourage tech-centric solutions, whether in material innovation, hardware, or digital.

Question 1.3 What does the programme offer?

The Spark Incubation Programme is designed in two phases to support you from early validation to company creation. In addition to the funding, it's a 9-month online incubation journey supporting early-stage cultural and creative tech entrepreneurs in transforming validated business concepts into formally established, market-ready ventures. The programme combines structured training, mentorship, business model development, company formation support, and access to the EIT Culture & Creativity ecosystem. It starts with Startup Sprint, which is a short, high-intensity, 2–3-day bootcamp 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.

What you will get if you are selected:

- Up to EUR 30,000 funding,
- In-person createch Startup Sprints,
- Goal-oriented topic workshops,
- Designated Coach,
- Curated Mentor access,
- Exclusive tech perks and partnerships,
- Network: Connect Europe's ecosystem,
- Createch founder community,
- Visibility and positioning.

Question 1.4 How many applications will be selected?

Up to 35 applications will be selected to participate in the Spark Incubation Programme.

Question 1.5 How long is the programme and when does it start?

The programme's duration is 9 Months, and it will start March 2027 and end December 2027

Question 1.6 What is the Startup Sprint and when is it taking place?

The Sprint is a short, high-intensity, 2–3-day in-person bootcamp where we kick off the programme which is designed to help early-stage cultural and creative tech venture founders validate the problem they aim to solve. Once the applicant is selected for the Spark Incubation Programme, they will be invited to participate in the in-person Startup Sprint, with a minimum of one founder to represent and work on the business concept they applied with. he first Sprint will take place in March 2027, and the exact location will be announced ahead of time.

Question 1.7 What will I get out of the Spark Incubation Programme?

The Spark Incubation Programme aims to help early founders to translate their business concepts into viable ventures, validate its market potential, and build an MVP.

What is waiting for you if you are selected:

- Validate your idea and problem–solution fit: Test your assumptions, engage with users, and refine your solution based on real feedback,
- Build and iterate your product: Develop your MVP or prototype through rapid testing, feedback loops, and continuous improvement,
- Design and validate your business model: Clarify your value proposition, revenue logic, and go-to-market approach based on evidence,
- Understand your customers and market: Generate insights through direct user engagement to support early traction and informed decisions,
- Strengthen your entrepreneurial skills: Build capabilities in decision-making, prioritisation, and financial thinking,
- Grow with peers and expand your network: Learn alongside other founders and connect with mentors, experts, and ecosystem partners across Europe,
- Build the right team: Connect with potential co-founders and strengthen your team with complementary skills,
- Launch your company: Establish a legally registered venture by the end of month 3 and prepare for market entry.

You'll get there through hands-on workshops, close support from coaches and mentors, and access to the EIT Culture & Creativity network, giving you a whole village around you as you build your venture.

Question 1.8 Does the project need to be scalable across countries, or can it be focused on just one?

We take a broad view of scalability. Your project can be rooted in one country and still be considered scalable. Our programme and experts will help you explore whether there are opportunities to expand, but international scalability is not mandatory.

Question 1.9 Can I apply as a solopreneur without a co-founder?

Yes. Solopreneurs are welcome to apply. At the same time, we strongly value the power of complementary teams. In the application form, you will be asked whether you are currently looking for a co-founder or not. Throughout the programme, we also aim to create opportunities for solopreneurs to connect with potential co-founders and build their teams.

Question 1.10 I am working full-time or studying, can I still apply?

Yes, you are welcome to apply. However, we expect selected participants 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.

Question Q1.11 What is the expected weekly time commitment, and when will group clinics and coaching take place?

The programme expects a commitment of 10–15 hours per week. Group clinics and 1:1 coaching sessions will take place during the programme. Exact time slots had not yet been confirmed at the webinar. The report does not confirm whether sessions will generally fall within 09:00–17:00 CET or whether alternative scheduling will be available.

Question Q1.12 What should a selected venture have achieved by the end of the nine-month programme?

The minimum baseline described during the webinar is: a registered company, evidence of a tested prototype or MVP, market-testing results, a validated business model and an updated pitch deck.

Question Q1.13 What happens if technical testing shows that the prototype does not work as expected?

Acceptance is linked to the programme deliverable checkpoints (DEL1, DEL2 and DEL3) described in the Call Guidelines. Material changes to the approved work plan require prior formal approval from EIT Culture & Creativity. Deviations may also be explained in Deliverable 3.

Question Q1.14 Can the technical approach or solution be refined during the programme?

The Venture Execution Plan is a working roadmap and can be refined. The core venture scope must remain substantially consistent with the approved application. Significant changes require prior approval from EIT Culture & Creativity. Applicants are advised discussing proposed changes with the Programme Manager and reflecting them in the execution plan.

Question Q1.15 Can a solo founder apply and hire a team later?

Yes. Applications may be submitted by an individual founder or by a team. A solo founder may therefore apply and bring in additional team members as the venture develops. Submitted proposal should demonstrate the founder's ability and commitment to implement the proposed venture, including how any skills or expertise needed to deliver the project will be secured.

Question Q1.16 If project goals are not fully achieved, must the grant be repaid?

The programme follows an actual-cost funding model, meaning that the final EIT Culture & Creativity contribution is determined by the actual eligible costs incurred, reported and accepted, up to the maximum amount awarded. Any prefinancing exceeding the accepted eligible costs may be recovered. Selected applicants are responsible for implementing the approved work plan and delivering the agreed milestones and deliverables. In cases of underperformance or non-compliance, EIT Culture & Creativity may apply corrective measures, including adjustments to the financial support. Significant changes to the approved implementation must receive prior formal approval.

Question Q1.17 How should applicants prepare an activity plan when the programme itself may change the venture's direction?

The plan is assessed under criterion B2 (Execution Plan and Use of Funds), including the quality, realism and coherence of activities, milestones, timelines and budget. Applicants should present a clear, realistic plan based on current knowledge. The plan is a working roadmap and will be refined during the Startup Sprint and programme.

2. Priority area

Question 2.1 Which sectors and types of innovation are covered by the Spark call?

The Spark cohort focuses on solutions in the architecture and fashion industries, including advanced and circular materials for fashion ecosystem and the built environment. Applicants must present a technology-driven business concept that creates clear value in one of these areas. A product's use of technology or its high-end design does not, by itself, establish eligibility. Applicants should explain how their solution addresses a relevant sector challenge or opportunity.

Question 2.2 Which types of projects are eligible under the Fashion and Architecture priority areas?

Projects should demonstrate a clear connection to the Fashion or Architecture sectors, a strong technology component, and the potential to develop a scalable, for-profit business model. Examples (not limited) of potentially relevant innovations include digital platforms for supply-chain traceability, algorithms that help reduce manufacturing waste, AI-driven content creation tools, and digital solutions that improve visibility for fashion brands.

Question 2.3 Can projects involving sustainability, social impact, or circularity be eligible?

Potentially, yes. Projects addressing sustainability, circularity, or social challenges may be relevant if they demonstrate a strong technology component, a scalable business model, and a clear connection to the programme's priority areas.

Question 2.4 Are solutions required to target consumers directly?

No. Both B2B and B2B2C solutions may be considered, provided they have a clear connection to the fashion sector and technology is a core component of their value proposition.

Question 2.5 Does interior architecture fall within the Architecture priority area?

Interior architecture and design may be relevant to the Architecture priority area. Applicants should clearly demonstrate how their proposed solution relates to the sector and meets the programme's technology and business-model requirements.

Question 2.6 Can a fashion education platform or an innovative clothing brand qualify?

Potentially, depending on the proposed solution. Applicants should demonstrate how their venture addresses a relevant challenge or opportunity in Fashion and how technology contributes to its value proposition. A business based solely on offering well-designed, high-quality, affordable clothing may not, by itself, demonstrate the technology component and innovation required by the programme.

Question 2.7 Can hardware or physical-product ventures apply?

Yes. Hardware ventures are within scope, but the proposed solution must demonstrate a clear connection to the Fashion or Architecture priority areas. For example, a high-end design product may be relevant to Fashion if its innovation is centered on advanced or circular materials, design for longevity or repair, sustainable production or supply chains, or circular business models. A design product alone may not be sufficient.

Question 2.8 Can digital platforms and AI-driven solutions qualify under Architecture?

Yes. Digital platforms, AI tools and other technology-driven solutions for architecture, interior design and the built environment may be considered under the Architecture priority area. Examples include tools for material selection, renovation decision-making, project management, architectural visualisation and design workflows. Applicants should clearly explain how their solution creates value for the sector.

Question 2.9 Can advanced materials be submitted as a separate priority area?

Applicants are advised to select Fashion or Architecture, whichever best fits the product, and describe the material innovation in the application.

Question 2.10 Can a bio-based or circular material solution qualify as tech-centric?

It may qualify. The solution must relate to Fashion or Architecture and technology must be a core part of the venture.

Question 2.11 Can a bio-based, circular material for built-environment interiors, such as hospitality lighting, fit Architecture?

Yes, it can be considered under the Architecture priority area. Its objectives include fostering circular innovation with a focus on new bio-based materials and technologies (Section 1.2.3). Applicants should explain clearly how their material creates value for the built environment, for example through interior applications in hospitality spaces.

Material innovation is one of the accepted forms of tech-centric solutions (Section 2.2). Applicants should describe clearly what makes their material or process innovative compared to existing solutions. This is assessed under criteria A2 (Innovation & Differentiation) and B1 (Relevance to CCSI & Use of Technology).

Question 2.12 Can a technology platform for furniture and interior design using XR/AR fit the Architecture priority?

Yes, it can be considered under Architecture. Applicants should explain clearly how it creates value for the architecture and built-environment sector. The independent external evaluators make the final assessment.

Question 2.13 Must an Architecture proposal directly contribute to net-zero goals?

No. Direct contribution to net-zero goals is not necessarily required for Architecture proposal.

Question 2.14 Can a Fashion application mention Architecture, Gaming or Cultural Heritage as future expansion markets?

Only Fashion or Architecture can be selected as the application priority area. The priority selection helps match the proposal with relevant evaluators. Applicants should keep the core problem–solution case clearly anchored in the selected priority area.

Question 2.15 Can a technology with potential Fashion applications be improved or adapted during the programme?

The application must already present a clear problem–solution hypothesis within the selected priority area and explain the Fashion problem addressed. The solution may be refined during the programme, but the core venture scope must remain substantially consistent with the approved application. Significant changes require prior approval.

Question 2.16 Is complete novelty required, or can an existing market-tested idea be adapted?

Complete novelty is not required. Criterion A2 (Innovation & Differentiation) considers novelty, originality or meaningful differentiation. An adapted idea may score well if the applicant clearly explains what is different, such as its technology, business model, user experience, process or application. A direct copy without clear differentiation would score poorly under this criterion.

Question 2.17 Can a fashion-focused digital tool qualify if it does not directly address sustainability or circularity?

Potentially yes. A digital tool improving efficiency, reducing manual work or enabling reuse of existing designs may fit. The final decision is made through external evaluation.

Question 2.18 Can a digital solution serve the Fashion or Architecture ecosystem without the applicant working directly in those industries?

Yes. The solution must address a problem in Fashion or Architecture, but founders do not need to work directly in these industries. At least one founder must have a minimum of one year of experience relevant to the business idea (Section 2.2). This experience does not need to be in the industry itself and can come from formal education, professional practice, or incubation and domain-specific programmes. Applicants should explain how their experience relates to the needs of the sector, and how they plan to close any knowledge gaps, for example through co-founders, advisors or partners. This is assessed under criterion C2 (Founder / Team Capability & Commitment).

3. Admissibility and Eligibility

Question 3.1 Can I apply if I already have a registered company?
The programme is intended for ventures that have not yet established a registered legal entity linked to the proposed solution at the time of application. Applicants who already have a company connected to their proposed solution are not eligible for this call. https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/grow-your-company

Question 3.2 Can a project be eligible if it already has a prototype or is being piloted?
Having a prototype or running pilot projects is one of the expected and preferred criteria as evidence of the solution's existence and level of maturity. It does not exclude an applicant.

Question 3.3 Can I apply if I own a company operating in a different sector or developing a different product?
An existing company does not eliminate the applicant if it is unrelated to the proposed solution. However, the programme requires the creation of a legal entity for the selected venture by the end of Month 3. The applicant will be expected to s commit to establishing a new venture within the defined timeline to continue receiving the support and the fund.

Question 3.4 Can I apply if my existing company is dormant or has no revenue?
The absence of revenue or the fact that a company is dormant does not, by itself, establish eligibility. The key consideration is whether a registered company is linked to the proposed solution and whether the applicant meets the programme's incorporation requirements.

Question 3.5 Can self-employed individuals apply?
Applicants registered as self-employed may be eligible, provided they meet the programme requirements, have no registered company linked to the proposed solution at the time of application, and intend to establish a legal entity for the venture if selected.

Question 3.6 When should the selected applicants establish their companies?
Applicants should not have a registered company linked to the proposed solution at the time of application. If selected, establishing a legal entity is a mandatory programme deliverable. Company creation is expected between the signature of the subgrant agreement and end of Month 3. Applicants should follow the official programme timeline and confirm the applicable deadlines before taking incorporation steps.

Question 3.7 Can I incorporate my company after submitting the application but before the selection results are announced?
Applicants should not have a registered company linked to the proposed solution at the time of application and that company creation is expected after selection. Applicants should not assume that

incorporating before the selection results are announced is permitted. If selected, company creation is expected between the signature of the subgrant agreement and the end of Month 3.

Question 3.8 Can I apply as an individual while maintaining an existing sole proprietorship or self-employed registration?

Yes, provided the proposed venture is separate from your existing activities and is not operated or commercialised through the existing business. Tax registration as a natural person does not, by itself, affect eligibility. Applicants must provide accurate information about their legal status and may be asked to supply supporting documentation.

Question 3.9 Can I apply if my proposed venture already has pilot customers or sales invoiced through another company?

Yes, provided the company invoicing those activities is not registered for the proposed business concept and the venture otherwise meets the eligibility requirements. Applicants may report existing pilots and sales as evidence of early traction. They should clearly explain the invoicing arrangement and may provide supporting invoices, with confidential information anonymised where appropriate. Final eligibility is determined during the formal eligibility check.

Question 3.10 Can I apply as a team, and what ownership requirements apply if we are selected?

Applications may be submitted by individuals or teams. If selected, the applicants must establish a new company for the proposed venture by Month 3 of the programme. The original applicant or applicants must retain at least 50% ownership and effective control of the new company, in accordance with the applicable call requirements.

Question 3.11 Can I submit applications for two different business concepts?

Yes. An applicant or founding team may submit more than one application for several distinct business concepts. However, only one of the applications can be supported under the programme. Each application should describe a distinct venture, with clearly separated activities, outputs and costs. Double funding of the same activities or costs is not permitted.

Question 3.12 What legal form must the new company take, and where must it be registered?

Selected applicants must establish a new legal entity by Month 3. The entity must be registered in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, obtain a Participant Identification Code (PIC), and pass legal entity validation. The eligibility of specific national legal forms, including sole-trader arrangements without separate legal personality, should be checked against these requirements. Applicants should confirm whether it can meet the registration and validation requirements before relying on it.

Question 3.13 How long must the newly established company remain active?

Company must remain registered and active until the end of the funding period to receive the full funding. For the 2026 call, the programme runs until December 2027, followed by a final financial review between January and March 2028, with the final settlement payment expected in April 2028.

Question 3.14 Can I apply if I have a concept and technical mock-ups but no functional prototype?

Yes. A functional prototype is not mandatory in every case. Technical mock-ups, interface designs and user-experience flows can constitute acceptable evidence. However, applicants must provide at least one form of tangible evidence beyond the concept stage. Early validation through user interviews, feedback from prospective customers or other relevant evidence is also recommended. The strength of the evidence is assessed by evaluators under the applicable prototype/concept evidence and market validation criteria.

Question 3.15 Must a founder have direct professional experience in Fashion or Architecture?

Direct experience in the selected industry is not a formal requirement. However, evaluators assess the founding team's capabilities and understanding of the relevant domain. Applicants should explain how their existing skills and experience relate to the needs of their target sector and how they plan to address any knowledge gaps. Possible approaches include working with co-founders, advisors, partners or future team members. Not having one year of relevant experience does not automatically exclude an applicant, but it may negatively affect the score for founder/team capability and commitment. At least one founder with a minimum of one year of relevant domain experience is one of the mandatory requirements and this can be 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.

Question 3.16 Does the programme require a company to be registered in a specific country or through a particular platform?

There is no specific country required. If selected, you must incorporate a new company by Month 3 in any EU Member State or Horizon Europe-associated country (Pillar III) (Section 4.2). The company is registered through the usual national procedures of that country. After incorporation, the company must also: register in the EU Funding & Tenders Portal and obtain a PIC (Participant Identification Code) and complete legal entity validation through the EIT Community Onboarding Service.

Question 3.17 Does a founder's involvement with an unrelated third-party company automatically make the proposed venture ineligible?

No. Being a founder, owner, shareholder or employee of another company does not in itself make the proposed venture ineligible. The requirement is that no company has been registered for the business concept you apply with (Sections 2.1.1 and 4.2). The proposed venture must not be registered, owned, operated or commercialised through the other company. Applicants should explain clearly in their application how the new venture differs from the other company’s activities. If selected, the new venture

must be incorporated as a new company by Month 3, with the original applicants retaining at least 50% combined ownership and effective control.

Question 3.18 Can an existing company be used if it is only being used for legal terms on a pilot website and does not own the product?

Using an existing company for legal terms on a pilot website does not automatically make the venture ineligible, as long as that company does not own, operate or commercialise the product. Applicants should explain this arrangement clearly in their application. However, Spark aims to support emerging founders in establishing a new company. An existing company cannot be used, reused or repurposed as the venture's company, including by changing its name or trademark. If selected, applicants must incorporate a **newly established company** by the end of Month 3, with the original applicants retaining at least 50% combined ownership and effective control.

Question 3.19 Can an existing company simply update its activity codes to meet the Month 3 company-creation requirement?

No. Updating activity codes of an existing company would not meet the requirement. If selected, applicants must incorporate a new legal entity for the venture by Month 3. The original applicants must retain at least 50% ownership and effective control.

Question 3.20 Can an applicant who previously worked for a company in the same field, but did not own it, be considered to have a company linked to the proposed solution?

No. Previous employment at a company in the same field does not mean the applicant has a registered company for the proposed business concept. This experience can in fact be presented as relevant domain experience, which is assessed under criterion C2 (Founder / Team Capability & Commitment).
However, if any part of the proposed solution was developed at or belongs to the former employer, applicants must make sure they own or have legally secured the right to use all elements of the solution at the time of submission (Section 6.7).

Question 3.21 Does one founder need one year of experience specifically in Fashion or Architecture, and can an advisor's experience count?

At least one founder of venture must have a minimum of one year of relevant domain experience, which may be demonstrated through formal education, professional practice or relevant programmes. Direct industry experience is not a formal requirement.

Question 3.21 Can an existing MVP developed under a previous grant and held by another company be licensed or transferred to the new venture?

Applicants must own or have legally secured the right to use all elements of the product at the time of application. By submitting the application, they affirm this (Section 6.7). They also confirm it in the application form declarations by accepting the call conditions and confirming that all information

provided is accurate. Applicants should therefore be prepared to demonstrate these rights, and should check whether the previous grant sets any conditions on transferring or licensing the results.
Spark funding cannot be used for activities, costs or results already funded by the previous grant (Section 3.1.1). The previous grant should be disclosed in Part B, under the question on external financial support, together with a clear explanation of how the activities planned under Spark differ from it.

Question 3.22 Can two teams with no common founder submit distinct concepts developed through the same informal collaboration?

Each application must describe a distinct venture with clearly separated activities, outputs and costs. Double funding of the same activities or costs is not permitted. Whether two applications arising from the same informal collaboration meet this standard will be determined during the eligibility checks. Each selected applicant must establish a new legal entity by Month 3.

Question 3.23 Can an existing sole proprietorship or trade licence satisfy the company-creation requirement?

Self-employed individuals may be eligible in certain circumstances, but selected applicants must establish a new legal entity by Month 3 and meet the programme's registration and validation requirements

Question 3.24 Can applicants apply while also applying for a grant from another public funding body?

Yes. Applicants may apply for other funding in parallel. However, the same activities, costs, outputs or results must not be funded, or planned to be funded, through another EIT-funded instrument or EU funding source. Costs already funded by another EU programme or source cannot be reimbursed again by EIT Culture & Creativity. Applicants must ensure that there is no double funding and clearly distinguish the activities and costs covered by each funding source.

Question 3.25 Can external specialists who will not join the venture be listed as team members?

Applicants are advised listing only people who are part of the core team in the team section of Part B. An external specialist who will not be part of the venture should instead be presented as an external advisor or partner, with their role and contribution described.

4. Application process

Question 4.1 How do I apply?

Step 1: Carefully read the Call Guidelines and check your eligibility.
Step 2: Prepare the requested mandatory documents.
Step 3: Fill out application form and upload mandatory documents here.

Question 4.2 Can I get help preparing my application? Can I check whether my idea fits the programme before submitting a full application?

In order to prepare your application, you can:

- Review the call guideline,
- Join one of the info sessions by registering to ask your question directly to the Business Creation team,
- Watch recording from info session (available on call website)
- Use the Contact us form on the EIT Culture & Creativity website,
- Check the call website.

Question 4.3 Can I update my application after submission?

You can save a draft of your application, but please make sure to save the link. As admins, we don't have access and unfortunately can't recover it. After submission, you are still able to edit your application, again, just keep that link safe too.

Question 4.4 Should I present my solution as it exists today or describe what it could achieve with programme support?

Applicants should explain their current solution, its stage of development, the problem it addresses, and its potential for growth. They should also describe how participation in the programme would help advance the venture.

Question 4.5 What level of development or validation is expected at the application stage?

Applicants must provide at least one form of tangible evidence demonstrating progress beyond the idea stage. A fully functional prototype is not required.
Acceptable forms of evidence may include:

- A product demonstration or link to a working demo.
- Screenshots of a prototype or minimum viable product (MVP).
- Technical mock-ups, interface designs or user-experience flows.
- Pilot or testing documentation.
- Evidence of early validation, such as user interviews, customer feedback or expressions of interest.

Applicants should explain what has already been developed, what remains to be done, and how the available evidence supports the proposed business concept.

Question 4.6 When will applicants be informed of the selection results?

After Admissibility and Eligibility check, each applicant will receive a formal notification by email, informing if:

- The proposal has been selected for funding,
- The proposal has been placed on the reserve list,
- The proposal has been rejected.

Email will include the relevant assessment and, where applicable, the Evaluation Summary Report.

Question 4.7 How much technical information should the application include, and how can confidential information be protected?

Proposal should provide enough detail for evaluators to understand your solution, its innovation and its current stage of development. The relevant criteria are A2 (Innovation & Differentiation) and C4 (Prototype / Concept Evidence). Answers should be clear, concise and evidence-based, within the character limits of each question in Part B. Sensitive technical details, such as formulas or source code, are not required.

Confidential information: Any confidential information must be clearly labelled as such in your application. It is used only for evaluation and shared only with EIT Culture & Creativity staff, independent external experts and the Selection Committee, all bound by confidentiality obligations (Section 6.4).

5. Application form

Question 5.1 Where can I find the application form?

Applications must be submitted online through the submission platform. The application form and related documents are available via the official EIT Culture & Creativity Spark call website. Before starting, applicants should read the Call Guidelines and all related documents. The application must be completed in English. Incomplete applications cannot be considered.

Question 5.2 What do I need to upload in the application form?

Applicants must submit the online application form and the following supporting documents:

- Budget file: completed using the EIT Culture & Creativity funding template and saved in .xlsx format, showing the planned allocation of the requested funding of up to EUR 30,000.
- Venture Execution Plan: a single PDF of no more than 7 pages, including the budget plan. It should describe the planned activities, milestones, deliverables, development goals and intended use of funds.
- Lean Startup Canvas: completed and uploaded as a PDF. Applicants may use the template in Annex VI or prepare it using a digital tool such as Canva or Miro.
- Pitch video: a one-minute video introducing the applicant (and the team, where applicable) and the business idea. It must include English subtitles and be publicly accessible via YouTube or Vimeo.
- Evidence of the business idea and/or prototype: one publicly accessible link to tangible evidence, such as a demo video, prototype or MVP screenshots, technical mock-ups, pilot documentation, or a working solution.
- Part B of the application form: completed using the template in Annex III, saved as a PDF and uploaded separately.

All required sections and supporting documents must be completed and submitted. The maximum file size for each uploaded item is 500 MB; if a file exceeds this limit, the guidelines instruct applicants to create and upload a ZIP file instead.

Question 5.3 What is Part B of the application form?

Part B is the technical proposal. It is a separate document that applicants must complete using the template provided in Annex III of the Call Guidelines. It allows applicants to explain their business idea in more detail and is assessed together with the budget file and required annexes against the award criteria.

Part B includes:

- Proposal abstract: a short summary of the business idea, objectives, target users or markets, expected outcomes, and contribution to EIT Culture & Creativity's objectives.
- Excellence: the problem being addressed, the proposed solution, its innovation and differentiation, and the evidence supporting the concept.
- Impact: the expected results, market potential and broader value of the proposed venture.

- Implementation: how the venture will be developed and implemented, including the relevant work plan and resources.

Once completed, Part B must be saved as a PDF named *Part B_proposal acronym.pdf* and uploaded separately through the online submission platform.

Important note: Applicants must ensure that the information is accurate, complete and consistent with Part A and the required supporting documents. Applicants must fill in the text boxes without changing the question structure, respect the character limits, and ensure that any questions marked "Individuals only" or "Teams only" correspond to the applicant type selected in Part A.

Question 5.4 What is the Sanctions and Jurisdiction checkbox in the application form?

The Sanctions and Jurisdiction checkbox is a declaration confirming that you comply with the applicable EU restrictive measures, eligibility requirements, and jurisdictional restrictions set out in the Call Guidelines.

If you are applying as an individual, you must confirm that you are not subject to EU restrictive measures that would prevent your participation in or receipt of funding under the call. If you are applying as a team, the declaration applies to both the applicant and all designated team members.

Before ticking the box, please make sure that the declaration applies to you and, where relevant, to all designated team members. Further details on eligible countries and jurisdictional restrictions are provided in Call Guidelines.

Question 5.5 What does the Financial Capacity checkbox mean in the application form?

By ticking this box, you confirm that you (if applying as an individual) or you and the designated team founders (if applying as a team) have the financial capacity needed to implement the proposed project. You also acknowledge that EIT Culture & Creativity may request supporting documents to assess your financial capacity, such as financial statements, business plans, audit reports, information about your dependence on EU funding, or records of previous financial performance. If you fail to provide the requested information or submit false, incomplete or misleading information, your application may be rejected, an award decision may be withdrawn, the contracting process or agreement may be terminated, and/or funds may be recovered, where applicable.

Question 5.6 What counts as a publicly accessible link?

A publicly accessible link is a URL that allows evaluators to view the submitted evidence of your business idea, prototype or solution. This may include a product demonstration, demo video, prototype or MVP screenshots, technical mock-ups, pilot documentation, or a link to a working solution. The link should provide direct and reliable access to the relevant materials so that evaluators can review them as part of your application. Applicants should ensure that the materials are available and accessible throughout the evaluation process.

Question 5.7 Must all supporting documents and application materials be in English, and are official and unofficial translations accepted?

Yes. The entire application must be submitted in English, including the online Application Form, Part B (Technical Proposal), and all mandatory supporting documents and uploads. Where applicable, applicants must provide an English translation of documents originally issued in another language. Both official and unofficial translations are accepted. For the pitch video, if the presentation is delivered in a language other than English, English subtitles must be provided and clearly available to understand the content.

6. Evaluation process

Question 6.1 How are applications evaluated?

After Admissibility and Eligibility check, proposals passing to the Quality Evaluation stage, conducted by independent External Expert Evaluators (EEEs) against 3 criteria followed each with sub-criteria:

Excellence (maximum score: 15 points)

- Problem & Solution
- Clarity Innovation & Differentiation
- Gender mainstreaming and the integration of the gender dimension

Impact (maximum score: 10 points)

- Relevance to CCSI & Use of Technology
- Execution Plan and Use of Funds

Quality and efficiency of the implementation (maximum score: 25 points)

- Commercial logic and venture viability
- Founder / Team Capability & Commitment
- Lean Business Canvas Quality & Hypothesis Strength
- Prototype / Concept Evidence
- Entrepreneurial Spirit & Experience

Each criterion is scored from 1 to 5 points. Up to 35 top-ranked proposals that pass the quality evaluation will undergo a portfolio selection assessment conducted by the EIT Culture & Creativity Selection Committee. The Selection Committee members will assess each proposal on the basis of the submitted application and the interview against the criterion and sub-criteria:

KIC portfolio strategic fit and contribution to financial sustainability objectives (maximum score: 30 points):

- Market Validation
- Growth Potential
- Financial Sustainability & Portfolio Alignment

Applicants invited to the Interview will be requested to prepare a short presentation to support the interview. Structure of the interview will follow:

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

Question 6.2 Can the programme team confirm whether my specific business idea will be eligible before I apply?

We cannot pre-assess or guarantee the eligibility of individual proposals before submission. Applicants should review the call requirements and clearly explain how their solution fits the selected priority area, creates value for the sector, and meets the programme's eligibility criteria. Final eligibility is determined

during the formal eligibility check, while the proposal's quality and strategic alignment are assessed through the evaluation process.

Question 6.3 How is the founding team's capability assessed?

The evaluation considers the founding team's skills, relevant experience, understanding of the target domain and commitment to developing the venture. Applicants should describe their relevant experience and demonstrate how the team can deliver the proposed solution. Where specific expertise is missing, they should explain how they plan to address the gap through additional team members, advisors or partners.

Question 6.4 How are prototypes and market validation assessed?

Evaluators assess the strength of the evidence provided to demonstrate progress beyond the concept stage, together with evidence of market validation. Applicants should provide the most relevant available materials, such as technical mock-ups, product demonstrations, pilot results, user feedback or customer expressions of interest. The evidence should be clearly linked to the proposed venture and its development stage.

Question 6.5 How should intellectual property rights be demonstrated at application stage?

Applicants must affirm that they own, or have legally secured the right to use, all elements of the product. This is done by submitting the application (Section 6.7) and by accepting the call conditions in the application form declarations. No specific IP documents need to be uploaded at application stage. However, EIT Culture & Creativity may request supporting documents during the eligibility check, contracting or later checks and audits (Sections 6.8 and 6.9). Where relevant, applicants should explain the IP status of their solution clearly in the application, for example:

- IP held by another company or institution;
- Licence or transfer arrangements;
- The use of open-source components.

Any confidential information must be clearly labelled as such (Section 6.4).

7. Budget & Financial support

Question 7.1 Is there a financial support?

Yes. Selected applicants may receive financial support of up to EUR 30,000 per project to help validate their business idea, test their product in the market, establish a new legal entity and develop their venture through the Spark programme. The funding covers up to 100% of actual eligible costs, subject to the maximum contribution and the programme's cost eligibility rules. No co-funding is required. Financial support is linked to participation in both the Startup Sprint and the Spark Incubation Programme, and is not guaranteed automatically upon selection.

Question 7.2 When will I receive the funding if selected?

The payment of the up to €30,000 funding will be in three instalments connected to the deliverables

1- Up to €12,000 is released upon delivery of the DEL 1 and Startup Sprint participation.
2- Up to €12,000 is released upon delivery of the DEL 2 and company formation.
3- Following the programme's conclusion and review of the annual reporting delivered by the participant, up to the remaining €6,000 is paid.

The final amount retained depends on the eligible costs incurred, reported and accepted under the programme's financial rules. Any remaining balance is settled following the final financial assessment.

Question 7.3 Is equity required in exchange for the EUR 30,000 programme funding?

No. The financial support provided through the Spark Incubation Programme is not an equity investment.

Question 7.4 Can the programme funding be combined with other funding sources?

Yes, provided that the same activities, costs, outputs or results are not funded, or planned to be funded, through another EIT-funded instrument or another EU funding source. Costs already funded by another EU programme or source cannot be reimbursed again by EIT Culture & Creativity.

Question 7.5 What costs should be included in the budget?

The budget should include costs that are directly related to your approved project activities, necessary and proportionate to implementing your Venture Execution Plan, and linked to the programme's milestones and deliverables. The budget must be submitted using the provided budget template.

Eligible expenditure falls into the following categories:

- Personnel costs: up to EUR 15,000.
- Travel and subsistence: up to EUR 7,500.
- Subcontracting: up to EUR 5,000 and no more than 15% of the total eligible project costs.
- Other goods and services: up to EUR 7,500.

These are maximum eligibility ceilings for the nine-month programme, not guaranteed allocations. The total EIT Culture & Creativity contribution, including indirect costs, cannot exceed EUR 30,000 per project.

Indirect costs are calculated at a flat rate of 25% of the eligible direct costs included in the calculation base and are included within the EUR 30,000 maximum.
All costs must be incurred during the eligible period, properly documented and verifiable, and comply with the applicable financial and legal requirements. For detailed eligibility rules, please see Call Guidelines.

Question 7.6 How should an early-stage venture demonstrate financial sustainability when it is still at the idea stage?

Applicants are not expected to have a fully established business or proven revenue at this stage. However, they should demonstrate a credible understanding of how their venture could become a viable, scalable, for-profit business. This can be demonstrated by explaining the customer problem being addressed, the target market, potential customers and competitors, and how the venture plans to generate income. Applicants should also present a realistic execution plan, with clear milestones and a budget that shows how the requested funding will support the development and validation of the business idea. The proposal should demonstrate commercial potential and a plausible path towards a sustainable business, rather than relying on unsupported assumptions. Existing revenue or paying customers are not required, but applicants should provide evidence of progress beyond the concept stage, such as a prototype, demonstrator, working demo, screenshots, or pilot and testing documentation.

Question 7.7 Is FSM required?

The programme does not require applicants to sign a Financial Sustainability Mechanism to receive the programme's financial and incubation support.

Question 7.8 Can an individual applicant meet the financial capacity requirement if they rely on the initial prefinancing payment?

Potentially, yes. Relying on the initial prefinancing payment does not automatically prevent an individual applicant from meeting the financial capacity requirement. However, the prefinancing alone does not guarantee compliance. Applicants must be able to demonstrate their capacity to implement the proposed project, and supporting documentation may be requested.

Question 7.9 Must I cover any costs before receiving the first funding payment?

Yes. The initial prefinancing payment is linked to the completion of the first programme deliverable, which includes participation in the Startup Sprint. As the deliverable can only be completed after the Sprint, the first payment cannot be made beforehand. Applicants should therefore be prepared to cover upfront expenses, such as travel and accommodation expenses related to the Startup Sprint. Such expenses may be declared as eligible travel costs if they fall within the eligibility period and meet the conditions of the subgrant agreement.

Question 7.10 Can the initial prefinancing be used for company registration and early project costs?

Yes, funding may contribute to company formation and registration costs, early operational expenses and other eligible project costs, subject to the applicable rules. Costs must fall within the eligibility period and be properly documented. Costs incurred before the subgrant agreement is signed are at the applicant's own risk. Prefinancing is not a final payment. The final contribution is based on the actual eligible costs reported, and any excess prefinancing may be recovered.

Question 7.11 Can a founder charge their own time as personnel costs, and what evidence is required?
Personnel costs may be eligible within the EUR 15,000 ceiling and should relate to people directly working on the venture activities. This may include founders' salaries after the company has been incorporated. For Months 0–3, costs must be allocated to the Initial Recipient. Founders are advised to keep detailed timesheets or equivalent records documenting dates, hours worked and activities performed, supported by any relevant evidence.

Question 7.12 Can conference and event participation be included in the budget?

Applicants may include travel, accommodation and subsistence costs related to participation in conferences and events, provided these are directly connected to the venture activities or relevant programme activities. Such expenses should be included under the Travel and Subsistence category, with a description of the purpose of the trip and the estimated costs. The category is subject to a maximum ceiling of EUR 7,500.

Question 7.13 Should travel to EIT Culture & Creativity events be included in the budget?

Yes. Applicants should include the potential travel and related expenses for participation in the Startup Sprint in their budget. The Startup Sprint is the only mandatory event, and at least one founder is expected to attend.

Question 7.14 Are the cells in the budget template protected, and can applicants modify the file?

No. The budget template is protected, and applicants cannot edit, modify or change its contents. Applicants should use the template as provided and must not add any additional content, worksheets/tabs, rows or columns, or make any other structural changes to the file.

Question 7.15 Should the Venture Execution Plan include the full budget workbook or only the completed budget tab(s)?

Applicants are advised to attach only the *Cash Flow forecast* tab to the Venture Execution Plan, rather than the full budget workbook. Applicants must ensure that the document complies with the applicable page limit.

Question 7.16 Can machinery be purchased using the programme budget?

Other goods and services category covers eligible purchases that do not fall under the other cost categories. Applicants should describe the machinery they intend to purchase, explain how it will support their venture activities, and indicate its estimated cost and the period in which the expense will be incurred.

Question 7.17 Can funding be combined with other grants, investment or crowdfunding?
The call allows other funding sources provided there is no double funding of the same activities or costs. Applicants must ensure the same activities, costs, outputs or results are not funded twice, including by another EU funding source.

Question 7.18 What documents may be requested to assess an individual's financial capacity?
The assessment is intended to establish whether the applicant has sufficient financial capacity to implement the proposal. Submitting additional supporting documents is not necessarily required in every case; whether they are requested depends on the circumstances of the individual application. EIT Culture & Creativity may request further documentation on a case-by-case basis where considered necessary for the assessment.

Question 7.19 Can company incorporation, notary, legal and accounting fees be charged to the grant?
Legal and accounting services may be included under the Subcontracting category, provided they are necessary for the venture activities and cannot reasonably be carried out by the team. Such costs must be clearly described and justified in the budget and are subject to the EUR 5,000 subcontracting ceiling and the additional limit of 15% of total eligible project costs.

8. Other

Question 8.1 Where can I find examples of innovative projects in the creative industries?

The programme team recommended the 100 to Watch list as a source of inspiration and examples of relevant ventures: https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/what-we-do/business-creation/100-to-watch.

Question 8.2 Where can companies that are already incorporated find support?

Companies that are already established may wish to explore the Shape and Scale programmes offered by EIT Culture & Creativity: https://eit-culture-creativity.eu/grow-your-company.

Question 8.3 Is English proficiency required to participate in the programme?

Yes. All programme activities are delivered in English, and translation support is not provided. Applicants must be able to truthfully confirm their English proficiency in the application form declaration.