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Fostering Resilience and Innovation in Europe through Networking
Development of clusters in the Cultural and Creative Industry ecosystem

2nd Open Call for project proposals dedicated to SMEs

to reinforce innovation and internationalisation in Cultural and
Creative Industries

Produced by

Venetian Cluster



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Index

| | |
|---|----|
| Part 0. Introduction..... | 2 |
| Part I. Context and background | 2 |
| Aim of the call | 3 |
| Part II. General objectives and requirements of the 2nd FRIEND CCI call for proposals..... | 4 |
| General and mandatory objectives of the call:..... | 4 |
| Eligible activities:..... | 6 |
| Who can apply –eligibility criteria..... | 7 |
| Consortium composition:..... | 8 |
| Providers selection and eligible services | 9 |
| Available budget | 11 |
| Financial Support | 11 |
| Timetable and deadlines:..... | 12 |
| Evaluation process: | 12 |
| Award Criteria: | 13 |
| Exclusion criteria: | 14 |
| General rules on eligibility of costs | 15 |
| Part VI. Application process and conclusions | 16 |
| How to Apply: | 16 |
| Communication of results:..... | 18 |
| Beneficiaries’ obligations: | 18 |
| Payment arrangements..... | 19 |
| Reporting..... | 20 |
| Information and contacts: | 21 |
| Help | 21 |
| Contacts | 21 |
| Complaints | 21 |
| Annexes:..... | 22 |
| Annex – A: Application form | 22 |
| Annex - B: Classification of the Cultural and Creative Industries sector within NACE | 22 |
| Annex - C: Declaration for of financial regularity, privacy, non-cumulation and non-retroactivity of grants | 22 |
| Annex D - Budget Form template | 23 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Template of GA (draft of Grant Agreement that awarded SMEs will sign with FRIEND CCI consortium) | 23 |
| Checklist: | 23 |

Part 0. Introduction

The FRIEND CCI Euroclusters is a partnership created from the homonymous project, funded by the European Union under the COSME-SMP-2021-CLUSTER call.

The project FRIEND CCI aims at contributing to an improved resilience of the [European Industrial Ecosystem of Creative and Cultural Industries \(CCI\)](#)¹ and to its green and digital transformation, by supporting the SMEs of the CCI ecosystem to build cross-innovation projects, build their skills and go international through financial and non-financial support. The project is organized in a way to establish a solid framework to support the CCI ecosystem within its lifetime and beyond. Within this framework, and thanks to the networks of its partners, the project will support innovative cross-sectoral projects by SMEs from all over Europe.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Venetian Cluster (IT): VHC

Creative Cluster OpenHub (RO): OpenHub

France Clusters (FR): CDIF

Cluster IDiA (ES): IDIA

Italienische Handelskammer München-Stuttgart (DE): ITALCAM

Part I. Context and background

The project FRIEND CCI, co-funded from the European Union's Single Market Programme (SMP) under grant agreement No. 101074465, foresees the provision of financial support to third parties, as a means to achieve its objectives. The FRIEND CCI consortium publishes its open calls, respecting transparency, equal treatment, non-conflict of interest and confidentiality provisions.

In particular, the calls will be carried out by respecting the following principles:

¹ <https://clustercollaboration.eu/in-focus/industrial-ecosystems/creative-cultural-industries>

- i. **Excellence.** The proposals selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topics and criteria set out in the call;
- ii. **Transparency.** Funding decisions will be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and all applicants will receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals;
- iii. **Fairness and impartiality.** All proposals submitted to the call are treated equally. They are evaluated on their merits, impartially and irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants;
- iv. **Confidentiality.** All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents are treated confidentially;
- v. **Efficiency and speed.** Evaluation of proposals and award of the financial support will be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation, and respecting the legal framework.

The FRIEND CCI project will involve over 1,000 SMEs at the EU level and will support at least 42 through financial and non-financial support, promoting cross-innovation projects to build resilience and boost the twin transition. In order to support at least 42 SMEs, FRIEND CCI consortium has launched this Call for Proposals directed to SMEs.

The following open call will open two times during the FRIEND CCI project lifetime, one in July 2023 and the other in November 2023. Accordingly, there will be two application windows and each call will be open for at least two months.

SMEs will be allowed to participate only one time as Partners or Lead Partners of a consortium of SME, in maximum one application in the second call for proposal. SMEs that participated to the first call and were not awarded for funding, are allowed to participate again submitting a different project.

On the other hand, is it possible for SMEs to participate multiple times as a provider for a consortium of SMEs, in both calls. Is important that the total amount of financial support received for a single SME and provider in the framework of FRIEND CCI Eurocluster cannot exceed 60.000 Euros.

Aim of the call

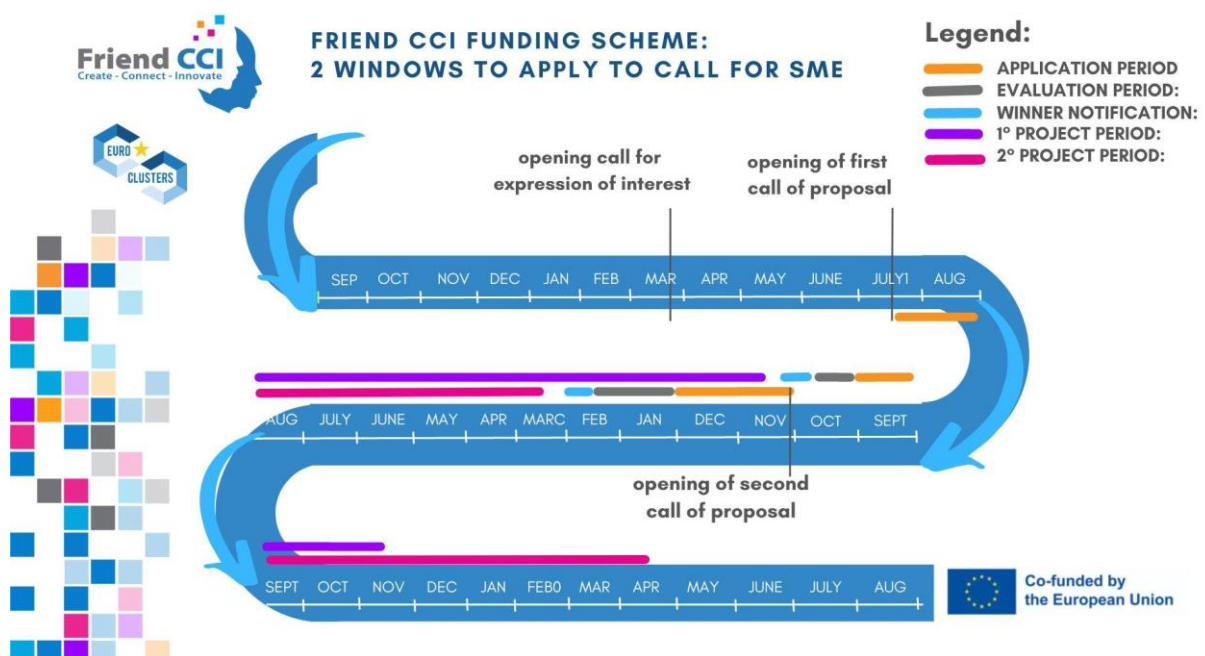
The FRIEND CCI call for proposals is dedicated to SMEs and focuses on building resilience and boosting the twin transformation to reinforce innovation and internationalisation in Cultural and Creative Industries².

The FRIEND CCI project offers financial support to SMEs in the form of grants, directed to the development and implementation of cross-sectoral projects aimed to bring innovation both at the

² Refer to CCI's definition at p.9.

level of products and at the level of processes/ technologies, with a specific eye on the needs linked to the twin transition. To this end, the support will entail mandatory training and upskilling/ reskilling activities, according to the specific needs of SMEs, and including skills needed for the green and digital transition. Also, as part of the support, SMEs will be asked to include activities to go international, based on their level of readiness.

Throughout the first and second call for proposal, at least 21 cooperation projects will be funded, with the requirement that at least two SMEs from two different industrial ecosystems are involved in each project (of which one must represent the CCI ecosystem), with the aim of fostering cross-fertilization and innovation between SMEs of different sectors. **Through 2 open calls for SMEs, the FRIEND CCI project expects to fund a minimum of 21 to a maximum of 53 projects, supporting at least 42 enterprises from 10 European countries.**



The selected projects will identify product innovations to reduce dependency on critical inputs and technologies in the Euroclusters’ value chains, and/or foster the implementation of business process innovations tied to the adoption of technologies that help SMEs meet requirements for their successful green and/or digital transitions.

Part II. General objectives and requirements of the 2nd FRIEND CCI call for proposals

General and mandatory objectives of the call:

General objectives of the call are the following:

- The development and implementation of cross-sectoral projects aimed to **bring innovation at the level of products and/or at the level of processes/ technologies**, with a specific focus on the needs linked to the twin transition;
- Fostering cross-fertilization and innovation between SMEs of different ecosystems;
- Go international, to boost access to global supply and value chains.

To ensure the relevance and impact of this call’s initiative, it is imperative that all submissions explicitly center around and delve deeply into cultural and creative themes and contents. Proposals that deviate from these core topics will regrettably be deemed less competitive in the selection process.

The projects will be linked to the call specific objectives, as highlighted in the below table. To this end, the support will entail **mandatory training and upskilling/ reskilling activities**, according to the specific needs of SMEs, and including skills needed for the green and digital transition. Also, as part of the support, **SMEs will be asked to include activities to go international**, based on their level of readiness to internationalise. It is crucial to underscore that these mandatory activities are intended to benefit both the employees, and the SMEs as entities, contributing to their overall development and competitiveness.

Mandatory objectives:

The call for proposals gives the possibility to **choose at least one between two mandatory objectives**. Applicant consortiums must aim at submitting joint projects that target at least one, or both of the main objectives:

- 1. Introduce or enhance product innovations;**
- 2. Adopt processes and technologies to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy.**

More in detail :

1. Introduce or enhance product innovations

The aim is to reduce the dependency of companies in the ecosystem on critical inputs and critical technologies through a development of novel ideas, substitutes, innovative products or services. Innovation is central to cope with disruptions in supply or to accelerate the uptake of green and digital technologies. Applicants should submit proposals that center in innovation in their value chains. They should undertake innovation activities i.e. all developmental, financial and commercial activities undertaken by a firm that are intended to result in an innovation for the firm.

2. Adopt processes and technologies to reinforce transformation into a greener and more digital economy

The aim is to adopt processes and technologies that improve the value chains’ efficiency in the use of resources, open markets for green technologies and services and uptake of digital solutions. This objective implicates the uptake of digital solutions, adopting digital instruments and developing a digital component in SMEs’ business models.

To accelerate the green transition, the applicants shall specifically contribute to improve resource efficiency, support green entrepreneurship and facilitate market access for SMEs offering green products and services. The digital transition requires the uptake of solutions by virtually all businesses. The transformation generates new competitive fields as it brings in new opportunities and new ways to create value.

Eligible activities:

All projects should be of exactly 12 months duration.

- All projects submitted should span a precise duration of 12 months. This one-year period must be organized into two mandatory Work Packages (WPs), with each Work Package covering a period of six months. It is crucial that applicants adhere strictly to this structure, ensuring their proposals encompass exactly two WPs, each lasting six months, to align with the project duration requirements.

Applicant proposals MUST INCLUDE the following mandatory activities :

- A. At least one **upskilling-reskilling activity** for SME employees, according to the specific needs of SMEs, and including skills needed for the green and digital transitions.
- B. At least one activity **to Go international**, to boost access to global supply and value chains, based on their level of readiness.

To help applicants, the FRIEND CCI Eurocluster has prepared a list of potential actions under each of the two mandatory activities. The listed potential actions are to be understood as non-exhaustive.

| |
|--|
| A. Reskilling and upskilling of the workforce and talent management |
|--|

Potential actions:

- Develop training programmes for at least one of the partners'(SMEs) employees on digitalization and digital skills,
- Conduct training for at least one of the consortium partners' (SME) managers on the digital transition, and/or green transition and/or support on internationalization, with the support of an external training provider;
- Organizing training for the SME's management to facilitate the acquisition of skills needed to streamline and accelerate an innovation process within the company.

| |
|--|
| B. Go international to boost access to global supply and value chains |
|--|

Potential actions:

- Sign business agreements and develop joint collaborative agreements with relevant partners from third countries (i.e. from non-SMP COSME pillar countries³);

³ Please see List of Participating Countries in the Single Market Programme (SMP) https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf

- Conduct intelligence gathering (e.g. market analysis of global demand; study about competing players, relative positioning, market trends and opportunities, and defining the added value of the partnership's combined competencies in relation to this);
- Identify the right partners in third countries, notably through tailored fact-finding missions and joining relevant networks;
- Boosting internationalization of the partners of the consortium (SMEs) by receiving services from professional providers in the form of education and trainings opportunity aimed at increasing the internationalization competitiveness;
- Prepare tailored identity shaping and joint promotional activities such as the development of a joint communication/marketing and branding strategy to promote business cooperation as well as attract talents and investments worldwide;
- Collaborate with other local, regional, national and European support providers on matchmaking and other efforts.

Who can apply –eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible, the applicants (beneficiaries and affiliated entities) must:

- be legal entities;
- be established in one of the eligible countries, i.e.:
 - EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories (OCTs))
 - non-EU countries:
 - listed EEA countries and countries associated to the the Single Market Programme or countries which are in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement and where the agreement enters into force before grant signature⁴.
- **Only SMEs are eligible to apply for the FRIEND CCI open call**, by applying as a consortium of SMEs.

Definitions: For the purpose of this call, SMEs have to be understood as Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. According to the European Commission's Recommendation (2003/361/EC), companies shall respect these requirements (see below table).⁵

| Company | Number of employees | Turnover | Total balance |
|---------|---------------------|----------|---------------|
| Micro | <10 | ≤2 M | ≤2 M |
| Small | <50 | ≤10 M | ≤10 M |
| Medium | <250 | ≤50 M | ≤43 M |

⁴ Please see List of Participating Countries in the Single Market Programme (SMP) https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf

⁵ EU SME definition: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-definition_en ,
 Ulterior translation of SME (PMI) in Italian language:
<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/42921/attachments/1/translations/it/renditions/native>

Professionals and freelancers with VAT cannot apply as Partners since they are not considered as SMEs for the purpose of this call. However, associations can apply with their own VAT code.

| Type of enterprise eligible for this call | Can it apply? |
|---|-----------------------|
| Microenterprise | Yes |
| Small enterprise | Yes |
| Medium Enterprise | Yes |
| Private Associations | Yes (if they own VAT) |
| Freelance or Independent professionals | No |
| Schools | No |
| Universities | No |
| Public Institutions | No |

Consortium composition:

Proposals must be submitted by a consortium of SMEs, which complies with the following conditions:

- A minimum of 2 SMEs applicants;
- Maximum of 5 SMEs applicants;
- at least 1 SME from the **CCI ecosystem**⁶ and 1 SME from **another ecosystem**⁷;
- Lead Partner must be from one of the following countries: Italy, Spain, France, Germany or Romania;

It is highly evaluated, but not mandatory, if the consortium includes SMEs from at least 2 different eligible countries.

In addition, it is highly evaluated if the applicant consortium includes SMEs coming from SMP countries⁸ different from the countries represented in FRIEND CCI consortium⁹.

⁶ Please see Annex B that includes NACE codes' lists for the CCI sector.

⁷ For any other industrial ecosystem than the one of the Creative and Cultural Industries, please see industrial ecosystem category <https://clustercollaboration.eu/in-focus/industrial-ecosystems>. See also Euroclusters 14 sectors division <https://clustercollaboration.eu/euroclusters>

⁸ See note n.4.

⁹ SMP participating countries different than Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Romania. The list of SMP participating countries can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/smp/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_smp_en.pdf

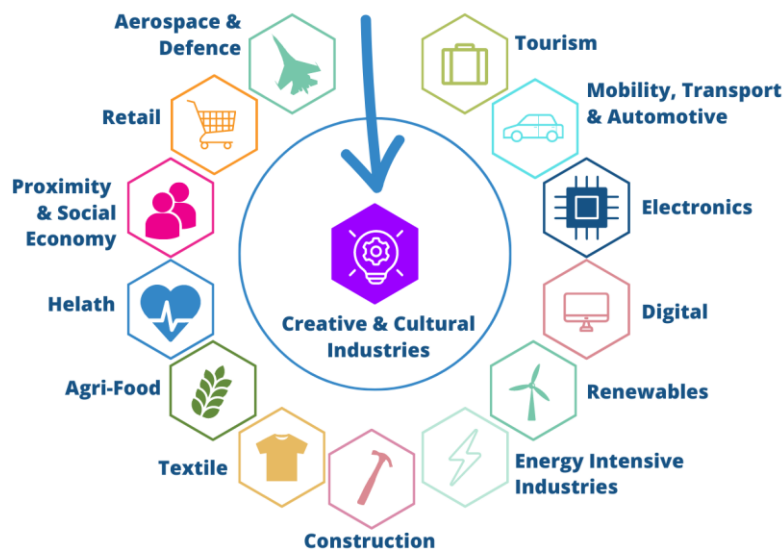
Specific attention needs to be paid to **EU-13 countries** (Member states which joined the European Union in or after 2004)¹⁰ in the calls and those EU regions with which the Euroclusters' partners had no previous cooperation and shall focus on engaging actors from regions with different levels of economic development.

Please note that the **applicant consortium will be better evaluated based on the number of partners**, as described in chapter "Award criteria" of this call for proposals.

SMEs are identified in this call as from CCI's Ecosystem if they work on topics included in the **NACE code's** list as described in the **Annex B**. Accordingly, SMEs that will not result as part of the CCI ecosystem as described in **Annex B**, would be automatically considered as from a different ecosystem.

Definitions: For the purpose of this call, **CCI ecosystem** has to be understood as listed in Annex B. The **NACE list** is a statistical classification of economic activities developed since 1970 in the European Union (EU).

CONSORTIUM COMPOSITION: CCI'S INTERLINKAGES WITH OTHER ECOSYSTEMS



Providers selection and eligible services

Applicant consortium will have as **mandatory requirement to include in their project budget the financial provisions for at least one service from an external service provider**. The service(s) should focus on one of the following topics: *Digital transition, Green Transition, Internationalization*.

¹⁰ Member states which joined the European Union in or after 2004 are :Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

FRIEND CCI has launched in March 2023 a call for manifestation of interests **for services providers**¹¹ with the aim of **furnishing SMEs a list of recommended providers**, as highly respecting standards companies that have manifested their interests in supporting SMEs in three required topics.

IMPORTANT: Although it is not mandatory to select the provider **from the list**¹² made available from the call for providers, we recommend it since it can help applicants to have control over the quality and delivery of the selected service.

Applicants should encourage potential providers to apply to the call for service providers, so that after validation from the FRIEND CCI Euroclusters, the provider is included in the recommended list. Successful applicants that select a provider not included in the list, will have to ensure the provider's registration to the list before the start of their service. In this way, FRIEND CCI Eurocluster can ensure that the provider comply with manifestation of interests' requirements.

The following services can be provided to the SMEs from the creative and cultural industries under the FRIEND CCI project. The list is not exhaustive. Other services can be provided if they serve the objective of the up- and re-skilling of the workforce, digitalisation of companies, improving sustainability, increasing resilience, and supporting internationalization.

Services for the digital transition: Any form of online and in-person service or training that covers digital technologies, including:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Augmented reality
- Big Data
- Cloud computing/technologies
- Cybersecurity
- Digital platforms
- Internet of Things
- Monitoring systems and traceability
- Online marketing
- Online collaboration
- Robotics
- Specialised (design) software
- Virtual reality

Services for the green transition: Any form of online and in-person service or training that covers methods and approaches to make products and services greener and more sustainable, including:

- Carbon footprint and emission of greenhouse gasses
- Circularity
- Eco-design
- Energy reduction
- Green construction

¹¹ Call for expression of interests for services providers at this link:

https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/eurocluster_post/friend-cci-call-for-expression-of-interest-for-service-providers/

¹² Find the providers list here: <https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/service-providers-friendcci/>

- Recycling
- Resource efficiency
- Circular Social Responsibility (CSR)

Services to support internationalization: Any form of online and in-person service related to internationalization:

- Analysis of targets and competitors
- Due Diligence Process
- Foreign Promotion
- Intercultural trainings
- Market study/analysis
- Matchmaking services
- Risk and opportunities analysis
- Study of legal and economic environment, financial system

Available budget

The available call budget for the call for proposals is **EUR 538.000,00 €**.



Financial Support

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Type of financial support: | Lump Sum Grant |
| Minimum funding per project: | 20.000,00 € |
| Maximum funding per project: | 50.000,00 € |

The Financial Support to SMEs takes the form of a Lump Sum Grant. Grants awarded to projects will be split in three instalments (a pre financing, an interim payment and a final settlement) in order to avoid risks of mismanagement of funds. The interim payment and the final settlement will be transferred based on SMEs interim and final records and reporting. The funding system will be decentralized to involve all partners into this process and to maintain a certain closeness to the geographical distribution of SMEs. Based on geographical proximity and requested budget amount, each successful projects will get a FRIEND CCI partner assigned as main tutor/officer. The FRIEND CCI

partner taking the role of tutor for a particular project will be responsible for transferring the grant to the project.

The costs will be reimbursed at 100%. Please be aware that the final grant amount may be reduced in case of non-compliance with the Grant Agreement. **IMPORTANT: 20% of the budget of each project should be dedicated to the SMEs from the CCI ecosystem (the SME which can prove it has NACE code mentioned in Annex B).**

Timetable and deadlines:

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Calls' opening date: | 13th of November 2023 |
| Deadline model: | Single-model |
| Call's deadline: | 14th January 2024 at 17.00 CET |
| Evaluation period and selection: | January-February 2024 |
| Grant Agreement signature: | February 2024 [tentative] |

Evaluation process:

The evaluation process is composed of two phases.

In the first phase, each application will be evaluated by designated assessors from 2 different partners of FRIEND CCI Eurocluster. One of the two FRIEND CCI partner evaluators will be from the same country as the applicant's lead partner, to facilitate understanding of mandatory annexes produced in the native language. The other partner evaluator will be chosen based on evaluation workload.

The two FRIEND CCI'S partners assessors will evaluate Application chapters which will be assessed according to the following scores from 0 to 5 (only full marks will be given, no decimals):

| Score | Description |
|---------------|--|
| 0 - None | The information requested is missing or incomplete |
| 1 - Very poor | The information provided is considered irrelevant or inadequate, compared to the specific call provisions |
| 2 - Poor | The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains significant weaknesses, compared to the specific call provisions |
| 3 - Fair | The overall information provided is adequate, however, some aspects are unclearly or insufficiently detailed, compared to the specific call provisions |
| 4 - Good | The information provided is adequate with good outlined details, compared to the specific call provisions |
| 5 - Excellent | The information provided is outstanding in its details, clarity and coherence, compared to the specific call provisions |

By adding together the 2 scores from 2 evaluating partners (with a maximum of 5 points per chapter), the final total score for each chapter will be reached (with a maximum of 10 points per chapter).

Award Criteria:

Each chapter of the Application form is part of the 4 award criteria, and will receive a partial score, no more than 10 points per chapter.

- 1) **Relevance:** this criteria can be reached by Application Chapters:
 - Application Form, section 2: PROJECT SHORT SUMMARY;
 - Application Form, section 4: PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND;
 - Application Form, section 5: CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY;
- 2) **Quality:** this criteria can be reached by Application Chapters:
 - Application Form, section 8: WORK PLAN AND TIMELINE;
 - Application Form, Annexes;
 - Application Form, section 10: ADDITIONAL MATERIAL;
- 3) **Capacity:** this criteria can be reached by Application Chapters:
 - Application Form, section 9: BUDGET;
 - Application Form, section 7: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND VISIBILITY;
- 4) **Impact:** this criteria can be reached by Application Chapters:
 - Application Form, section 3: PARTNERS INFORMATION - CONSORTIUM COMPOSITION;
 - Application Form, section 6: IMPACTS AND INNOVATION LEVEL;

Each application can receive a maximum score of 100 points. Proposals will be evaluated and scored against the evaluation criteria listed below:

| Criteria | Min. pass score | Max . score |
|--|-----------------|-------------|
| 1) Relevance: Excellence aspects of the proposal for the CCI sector | 12 | 30 |
| <i>Application Form, section 2: PROJECT SHORT SUMMARY;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Application Form, section 4: PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND BACKGROUND</i> | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Application Form, section 5: CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| 2) Quality: Project design and implementation | 12 | 20 |
| <i>Application Form, section 8: WORK PLAN AND TIMELINE;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Application Form, section 10: ADDITIONAL MATERIAL;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| 3) Capacity: Partnership and sound management | 12 | 20 |
| <i>Application Form, section 9: BUDGET ALLOCATION PER BENEFICIARIES;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Application Form, section 7: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND VISIBILITY;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| 4) Impact: Ambition of the proposal and innovation level | 12 | 15 |
| <i>Application Form, section 3: PARTNERS INFORMATION - CONSORTIUM COMPOSITION;</i> | 6 | 10 |
| <i>Application Form, section 6: IMPACTS AND INNOVATION LEVEL;</i> | 6 | 10 |

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| 5) The consortium includes as partner SMEs from at least 2 different eligible countries | 0 | 2 |
| 6) Consortium includes SMEs coming from EU eligible countries different from Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Romania. | 0 | 2 |
| 7) Consortium includes 3 SMEs | 0 | 1 |
| 8) Consortium includes 4 SMEs | 0 | 2 |
| 9) Consortium includes 5 SMEs | 0 | 3 |
| Overall scores | 48 | 100 |

Proposals that pass the minimum pass score for each criterion will be considered for funding. Funding will be awarded on the basis of a shortlist starting from the highest score down, within the limits of the available call budget.

In case of applications with evaluations that reach the same total score, a second phase will be added to complete evaluation. The FRIEND CCI Evaluation Committee will be in charge of validating the first phase of the evaluation process and awarding the SMEs' proposals. The Evaluation Committee is composed by one representative of each FRIEND CCI partner. For proposals with the same score (within a strand) a priority order will be determined according to the following approach:

Successively for every group of ex aequo proposals, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- 1) Projects focusing on a theme that is not otherwise covered by higher ranked projects will be considered to have the highest priority.
- 2) The ex aequo proposals within the same strand will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the award criterion 'Relevance'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Impact'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Quality'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on their scores for the criterion 'Capacity'.
- 3) If this does not allow to determine the priority, a further prioritisation can be done by considering the overall project portfolio and the creation of positive synergies between projects, or other factors related to the objectives of the call.

Exclusion criteria:

SMEs cannot submit more than one proposal under this call. If such a case is detected by the funding body, it will lead to the ineligibility of all proposals of that SME. SMEs that participated to the first call and were not awarded for funding, are allowed to participate again submitting a different project.

It is imperative to emphasize that the allocation of funds is strictly intended for activities planned and executed within the designated project period. **Any activities undertaken prior to the commencement of the project, as delineated in the official project timeline, will not be eligible for funding.**

Moreover, applicants will be excluded from the evaluation process if they present at least one of the following situations:

1. Is not possible to double-fund the same activities that already receive financial support from European Funding.¹³;
2. **Single SMEs ask for more than 60k from FRIEND CCI grants. For instance, if one SME participates in the FRIEND CCI call twice, once as part of a consortium, once as provider of a consortium, it can't exceed 60k of financial support from the FRIEND CCI Eurocluster's grant;**
3. Present the characteristics of a "company in difficulty," as defined by EU Commission Regulation No.651/2014;
4. Lacking the necessary administrative, technical, operational and financial capacity to implement the project activities, as defined in Article 125 of EU Regulation No. 130.125 of EU Regulation No. 1303/2013;
5. Submit an incomplete application. All mandatory annexes must be present and must comply with requirements described by this call.

General rules on eligibility of costs

All eligible costs shall meet the following criteria:

- Be incurred in the project period;
- Be included in the approved budget;
- Be incurred in connection with the action and necessary for its implementation;
- Be identifiable and verifiable and recorded in the beneficiary's accounts in accordance with the applicable accounting standards and usual cost accounting practices;
- Comply with the applicable national laws on taxes, and be reasonable and justified and comply with the principle of sound financial management (in particular regarding economy and efficiency);

VAT eligibility in the budget:

As regards the eligibility of VAT, if applicants can deduct the VAT in their respective tax regime they should calculate the budget accordingly, removing VAT from the budget category B) Subcontracting and C) other Costs.

Budget categories for this call:

A) Personnel costs

This category includes employees and self-employed persons with VAT numbers.

B) Sub contracting

¹³ During application phase is requested to applicants to fill declaration of non-cumulative funding.

This category includes the mandatory services from at least one service provider to be selected based on the call requirements.

C) Other costs

This category includes the following sections:

- c1) Consumables
- c2) Equipment
- c3) Travels
- c4) Other expenses

In-kind contributions for free are allowed, but cost-neutral, i.e. they cannot be declared as cost.

Part VI. Application process and conclusions

How to Apply:

All proposals must be submitted directly online via the Cluster Submission Platform (CSP)
<https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/>.

Submission is a 2-step process:

- a) create a user account and register your organization on the Cluster Submission Platform (CSP);



[EUROCLUSTER CALLS](#) [CONTACT](#) [LOGIN](#)

Register

First Name *

Last Name *

E-mail *

Mobile *

- b) submit the proposal by accessing the Cluster Submission Platform (CSP), fill and upload the required documents under the call for proposal page:

https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/eurocluster_post/friend-cci-2nd-open-call-smes/

Submit your proposal on Cluster Submission Platform by filling required fields in 3 steps submission:

Step 1: APPLICANT INFORMATION. Please complete the fields with your business information;

Step 2: PROJECT INFORMATION. Please complete the fields with project information;

Step 3: ANNEXES. In this step it is required to upload the mandatory annexes in the requested format.¹⁴ The templates of the annexes to be filled-in and uploaded on the CSP (Annex A and Annex C) can be found attached to this document.



The screenshot shows a progress bar at the top with three steps. Below it are three buttons labeled 'STEP 1', 'STEP 2', and 'STEP 3'. 'STEP 3' is highlighted in green. Below the buttons, the text reads 'STEP 3: ANNEXES' followed by '1. ANNEX A - APPLICATION FORM'. There is a note: 'Please upload a signed version of the ANNEX A - APPLICATION FORM (max. file size 20MB).*' and a link: 'Press here to download a template of the ANNEX A - APPLICATION FORM'. Below that is a section for 'UPLOAD SIGNED ANNEX A - APPLICATION FORM (PDF) *' with a 'Select File' button.

The proposal must keep to the page limits of 20 pages, excess pages will be disregarded. Documents must be uploaded under respective annexe name in step 3 of the submission in the CSP otherwise the proposal might be considered incomplete and thus inadmissible. The proposal must be submitted before the call deadline.

List of Mandatory annexes:

- Application form of the partnership **Annex A**;
- Copy of ID of the legal representative of each applying SME;
- CV (in English) of project manager of the Lead Partner;
- Document of VAT registration for each applying SME, and evidence of their NACE code;
- Signed and scanned **Annex C** of each applying SME;
- **Annex D**: Budget form in Excel format.

It is mandatory that all partners register also on the FRIEND CCI's project platform with at least 1 account for each partner of the consortium.¹⁵

¹⁴ Figure below is only partial and with the only purposes of visually supporting the explanation.

¹⁵<https://euroclusterfriendcci.eu/register/>

Communication of results:

After the evaluation period FRIEND CCI Eurocluster will inform each applicant about their obtained score and evaluation results. The list of winners, will be published on the Cluster Submission Platform¹⁶ with their score. Winners announcement will be first done by email (evaluation letter), for this reason applicants should be sure to insert in the application emails that are checked frequently.

The winners of the First Call for Proposals will also be announced through the social media channels of the FRIEND CCI Eurocluster. All the announcements regarding news, changes and mandatory information for SMEs of the First Call for Proposals will be posted in due time on the Cluster Submission Platform, and on the social media channels.

Beneficiaries' obligations:

Definitions: if awarded, the applicant (participating SMEs) will become a **beneficiary** of this Call for Proposals.

The beneficiary SMEs must promote the sub-project, the FRIEND CCI project and its results, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner and to highlight the financial support of the European Union.

If you pass evaluation, your project will be invited to prepare the Grant Agreement together with an appointed FRIEND CCI project partner's appointed officer.

The Grant Agreement will set the framework for your grant and its terms and conditions, in particular concerning deliverables, reporting and payments. The Model Grant Agreement that will be used (and all other relevant templates and guidance documents) can be found on CSP.¹⁷

Definitions: For the purpose of this call, **Grant Agreement (GA)** has to be understood as a mandatory bilateral agreement.

Each beneficiary and each FRIEND CCI partner (funding entity) will sign a bilateral specific agreement; signing this agreement, the beneficiaries agree and accept the financial support and will implement its activities under its own responsibility, in accordance with the agreement's conditions and obligations. The applicant/coordinator applying for and receiving the financial support will be responsible for the implementation of the project and related financial reports and this same applicant/coordinator will receive the funding and distribute it to the other participants.

Internal Partnership Agreement: applicants will establish and sign a Partnership Agreement, an internal document, stating partners' role (the responsible and others) and parameters for payments, contributions and IPR. This document can cover topics such as how LP will distribute the funding to each beneficiary, deadlines and responsibilities). The FRIEND CCI Euroclusters will provide Beneficiaries with an editable template that beneficiaries can modify based on their needs.

¹⁶ <https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/>

¹⁷ https://clustersubmissionplatform.eu/eurocluster_post/friend-cci-2nd-open-call-smes/

Payment arrangements

Lead Partners of winning proposals must provide a guarantee to ensure the amount to be pre-financed and the interim payment by the FRIEND CCI Consortium in order to receive the funding and implement its project. **Guarantee should cover 60% of the project total budget. This guarantee must be presented within 30 days after the signature of the Grant Agreement** with SMEs by both parties. In addition to the guarantee, LP of each awarded project should present the last 2 approved balance sheets before signature of the Grant Agreement. FRIEND CCI Euroclusters allows different types of guarantee depending on the country of provenience of the Lead Partner of the applicant consortiums, as explained in the table below. **Only one of the two possible types of guarantees is required.**

| Allows: | Italy | France | Spain | Germany | Romania |
|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|---------|
| Bank Guarantee | X | X | X | X | X |
| Insurance Guarantee | X | | | X | |

The guarantee should be in euro and issued by an approved bank/financial institution established in an EU Member State. If you are established in Romania and would like to provide a guarantee from a bank/financial institution in your country, this is accepted only in euro.¹⁸

The fees and interest derived from requesting the bank guarantee can be included in the budget requested in the project proposal.

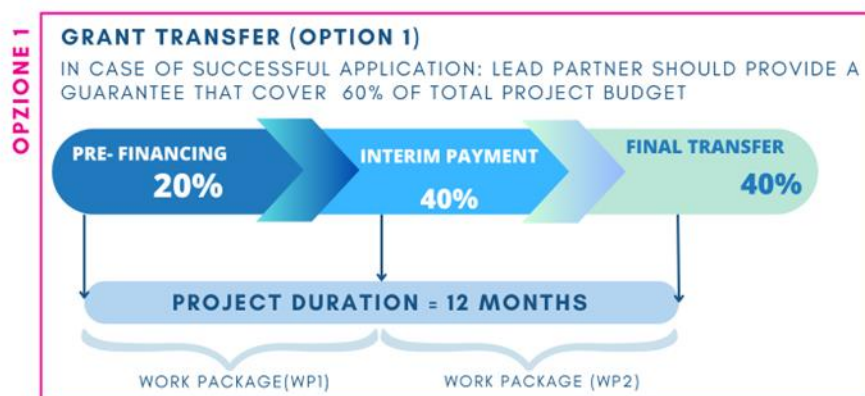
In other cases, if the SME cannot provide a bank /insurance guarantee, they can opt to receive 100% of the financing after the end of the project, once the final report has been approved. If this option is chosen, they do not need to provide a bank /insurance guarantee for the implementation of the project.

| Option 1 | Option 2 |
|--|---|
| Receive pre-financing after submitting the required guarantee. Receive interim payment after completing WP1, in month no. 8 of the project. Receive final grant transfer after completing WP2 at the end of the project, in month 13 of the project. | Not provide a guarantee, and receive all the grant after the end of the project (in month 13 of the project). |

¹⁸ Please note that the grant payments to Romanian LP of awarded projects will be made in euro and that we advise the SMEs to have a valid euro account, but not mandatory. Any exchange rates involved for grant payment to RON bank accounts will be supported entirely by SMEs.

Option 1: It is however important that the requested amount is covered and that the guarantee(s) are sent to us in time to make the pre-financing (scanned copy by email AND original by post). The guarantee will be released at the end of the grant, in accordance with the conditions laid down in the Grant Agreement. This option foreseen a transfer of the pre-financing corresponding to 20% of total project budget, in 30 days from reception of bank/insurance guarantee. The interim payment will be transferred as described in chapter "Reporting" corresponding to 40% of the budget. Final transfer will be done at the end of SME's project, corresponding to 40% of total budget.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF 1ST CALL OF FRIEND CCI EUROCLUSTER



OPZIONE 2

GRANT TRANSFER (OPTION 2)
 IN CASE LEAD PARTNER DO NOT PRESENT THE REQUIRED GUARANTEE, WILL RECEIVE THE GRANT TRANSFER AFTER THE END OF THE PROJECT.

Reporting

The reporting and payment arrangements are fixed in the Grant Agreement.

Lump sums allow less focus on financial management, and more focus on the scientific-technical content of projects. In fact, Lump sums are payments against deliverables, no financial report is required from the beneficiary. In lump sums, "what the third parties are doing" (output) prevails over the "how the third parties are doing".¹⁹

Since all project duration will be 12 months, the first reporting period will be in month the projects.

| Reporting | to be completed | When to submit | Evaluation | Grant paid | Amount to be payed |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------|------------|------------|--------------------|
|-----------|-----------------|----------------|------------|------------|--------------------|

¹⁹ From the COSME-SMP-2021-CLUSTER Q&A document: Question 10: "Are we allowed to propose a lump-sum to SMEs, i.e. to pay the FSTP against deliverables?"

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------|-------|-----|
| Pre-financing | guarantee | 30 days from GA signature | M1 | M1-M2 | 20% |
| Intermediate activity report | WP1 | M6 of SME project | M6-M7 | M8 | 40% |
| Final report | WP2 | M12 of SME project | M12-13 | M13 | 40% |

Information and contacts:

Help

As far as possible, please try to find the answers you need yourself, in this and the other documentation (we have limited resources for handling direct enquiries):

- Open Day events and materials to be uploaded on CSP on under the Call page;
- FAQs on the Topic page (FAQs must be sent to info@euroclusterfriendcci.eu);

Please also consult the Call page on CSP regularly, since we will use it to publish call updates;

Contacts

For IT questions on the Portal CSP, please contact alvaro.lombardo@idia.es.

For general Questions please contact info@euroclusterfriendcci.eu. For individual questions on application developments, please contact tutors from National Contact Points:

Italy: Ms. Carlotta Campanini, Project Manager from Venetian Cluster (Venezia)
carlotta.campanini@venetiancluster.eu

France: Ms. Lisa Besnard, EU and International Project Manager from France Clusters
lisa.besnard@franceclusters.fr

Spain: Mr. Alvaro Lombardo, Project Manager for IDiA Cluster, alvaro.lombardo@idia.es

Germany: Ms. Lorena Melis, Junior Project Manager from ITALCAM (Germany), melis@italcam.de

Romania: Ms. Georgiana Mihailovici, Project Manager from Open Hub Creative Cluster
projects@openhub.ro.

Complaints

For any complaints regarding the FRIEND CCI Open Call results, please contact National Contact Point referents within 5 days after the announcement of the Open Call results.

Your email should include the following information:

- Platform username and application title ;
- Lead Partner's contact name and details;
- Object of your complaint;

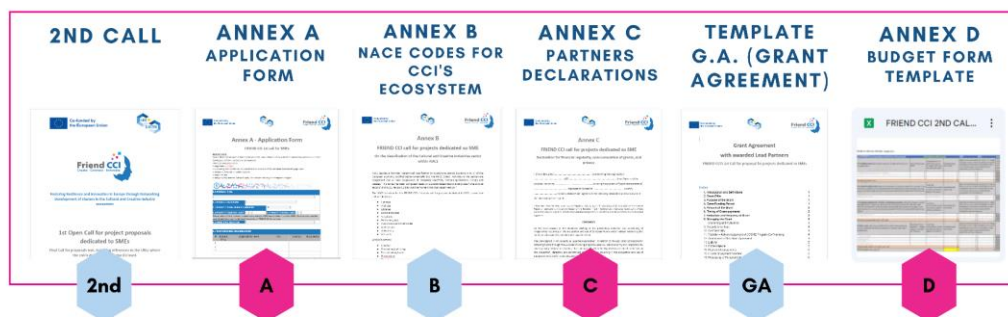
- Information and evidence of the alleged breach;

The Steering Board, which consists of representatives of the partners, will examine the complaint on the basis of the information brought forward by the applicant, will assess the case and decide whether the complaint is justified or not and will inform the applicant and the consortium on the decision taken. If the complaint is considered justified, the Steering Board will re-evaluate the project application and the related assessment part, subject to the complaint. The evaluators will then provide the Consortium an updated assessment. The final decision on the complaint will be communicated by the Steering Board to the applicant in writing within 20 working days from the date of submitting the complaint. This decision will be final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings within the programme if the complaint is based on the same grounds.

Important: Don't wait until the end — Complete your application sufficiently in advance of the deadline to avoid any last minute technical problems. Problems due to last minute submissions (e.g. congestion, etc.) will be entirely at your risk.

Annexes:

FRIEND CCI 2ND CALL ANNEXES DESCRIPTION



ANNEX IN MAGENTA COLOUR (A, C, D) NEEDS TO BE SUBMITTED DURING APPLICATION PHASE.

Annex – A: Application form

Annex - B: Classification of the Cultural and Creative Industries sector within NACE

Annex - C: Declaration for of financial regularity, privacy, non-cumulation and non-retroactivity of grants

Annex D - Budget Form template

Template of GA (draft of Grant Agreement that awarded SMEs will sign with FRIEND CCI consortium)

Checklist:

To support applicants verifying that they have all requirements and documents, find here below a table that works as a checklist.

| Verifying question | Checked |
|--|--------------------------|
| Is your project exactly 12 months in duration? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you divided your project into two mandatory Work Packages, each lasting six months? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you scheduled all planned activities to occur within the official project timeline, ensuring none were conducted prior to the project start date? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does your project align with the specific objectives outlined in the call document? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does your project involve cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation , as specified in the call? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Are your activities related to internationalization based on your SME's current level of readiness? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Does your project plan include training and skills development for the green and digital transition for your and your partners' SMEs? (as stated in p.6 of this 2nd call) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you provided a detailed description for all partners involved in the project? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you included the budget for all partners, using the Annex D in Excel format provided? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you attached identification documents (national IDs) of legal representatives for all partners? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is your mandatory service provider registered on the official service providers list ? Have you included the amount you will give to the provider for its service in your budget? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you attached the CV for the main project coordinator of your proposal? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Have you provided the VAT information and proof as additional annex for each partner? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you provided proof of NACE codes as additional annexes? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is the contact information for all partners complete and accurate? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you attached all required supporting documents , as specified in the application guidelines? (as requested at p.18 of this 2nd call) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you double-checked all eligibility criteria to ensure full compliance before submission? (as stated in p.7 of this 2nd call) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you register each partner to FRIEND CCI Platform as requested at p.17? ²⁰ | <input type="checkbox"/> |

²⁰ <https://euroclusterfriendcci.eu/register/>