CREASUS

Sustainability Business Models for CCSIs

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1. Introduction & Purpose

1.1 Introduction

Across Europe, the Cultural and Creative Sector Industries (CCSIs), which include artists, designers, creative entrepreneurs, cultural institutions, and freelancers, play a central role in shaping identities, communities, and economies. Yet, when it comes to navigating the fast-evolving world of **sustainability** and **funding**, these sectors face unique challenges.

Many creative professionals and organizations operate with limited capacity, unpredictable income, and within complex funding landscapes. While **sustainability** is increasingly seen as both a responsibility and a driver of innovation, accessing financial resources to implement environmentally and socially responsible practices often feels overwhelming, especially for smaller players.

At the same time, funding bodies, from local authorities to the European Union, are placing greater emphasis on **supporting sustainable practices** through various grant schemes, financing instruments, and private initiatives. However, the available opportunities are often **difficult to find, interpret, or apply for** without prior experience or technical know-how.

The present **Sustainability Funding Schemes Toolkit** was created to help CCSIs break through these barriers. It is a **hands-on guide** to support cultural and creative professionals and organizations in:

- Discovering and understanding the **range of funding opportunities** available for sustainability-oriented projects.
- Learning how to align their **activities with funders' priorities**.
- Improving the **quality and success** of funding applications.
- Exploring **new and emerging financial models** such as crowdfunding, impact investment, or blended finance.
- Using **real-life examples** from peers to gain confidence and inspiration.

Whether you're a **freelance artist**, a **music collective**, a **community-based cultural association**, or a **creative SME**, this toolkit has been designed to meet you where you are — and help you move toward a more sustainable future.

1.2 The CreaSus Project

The CreaSus Project – Creating Sustainability in the Cultural and Creative Sectors and Industries (CCSIs), is an EU-funded initiative that supports creative professionals, organizations, and institutions in integrating sustainability into their business models and daily practices. The project was developed in recognition of the growing need to align cultural and creative activities with the broader goals of environmental responsibility, social inclusion, and economic resilience. By combining research, innovation, and hands-on capacity building, CreaSus aims to help CCSIs reduce their environmental footprint, enhance their social value, and identify new opportunities for sustainable growth.

CreaSus operates on the belief that creativity and sustainability are deeply interconnected. The creative sector has a unique power to inspire change, challenge norms, and foster collaboration across disciplines and communities. By embedding sustainability within this process, CCSIs can play a key role in shaping a more responsible and future-oriented society. Through this project, the partners are working to translate this potential into practical tools and strategies that can be implemented by CCSIs of all sizes — from independent artists and micro-enterprises to cultural institutions and creative hubs.

To achieve these goals, the project brings together a consortium of organizations from Greece, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, representing diverse expertise in sustainability, innovation management, cultural policy, and creative entrepreneurship. The partnership ensures that the project's outputs are not only research-based but also grounded in the realities of creative work across different European contexts. Together, the partners are developing methodologies, indicators, and digital tools that enable CCSIs to measure and improve their sustainability performance while remaining competitive and creative.

The CreaSus project follows a structured approach, organized into several interconnected work packages that move from research to application. Early stages focus on understanding the current landscape and defining sustainability indicators for CCSIs. Building on these foundations, later stages develop practical tools and resources — such as the Sustainability Funding Schemes Toolkit — that help creative organizations access funding and implement sustainability actions effectively. Alongside these activities, CreaSus also promotes training, networking, and policy dialogue to strengthen the sector's capacity for sustainable transformation.

By the end of the project, CreaSus aims to leave a lasting impact: a stronger and better-connected European CCSI ecosystem that embraces sustainability as a core value and strategic advantage. Through its outputs, including this toolkit, the project seeks to ensure that creative organizations are empowered not only to adapt to changing

environmental and social expectations but to lead the way toward a greener, fairer, and more resilient future.

1.3 Purpose of the Funding Toolkit

The Sustainability Funding Schemes Toolkit has been developed to support Cultural and Creative Sector Industries (CCSIs) in identifying, understanding, and accessing funding opportunities that enable their sustainable transformation. As the creative economy continues to evolve, sustainability is no longer a peripheral issue, it is becoming central to the way cultural and creative organizations operate, innovate, and grow. However, many CCSIs struggle to navigate the diverse and often fragmented funding landscape that exists across Europe. The purpose of this toolkit is therefore to serve as both a guide and a decision-making support tool, helping creative professionals and organizations find the most appropriate financial pathways to achieve their sustainability goals.

This toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of available funding mechanisms, from European and national programmes to regional grants, private investments, and innovative financing models such as crowdfunding and impact investment. It simplifies complex information, breaking down the key characteristics of each scheme, such as eligibility requirements, application processes, co-funding obligations, and potential for replication in other contexts. By doing so, it enables CCSIs to make informed decisions and match their specific needs, capacities, and ambitions with suitable funding opportunities.

Beyond mapping funding sources, the toolkit also offers practical tools and resources that empower CCSIs to act. It includes guidelines, templates, and examples that can help users strengthen their funding proposals, develop clear sustainability strategies, and communicate the social and environmental impact of their projects. These tools are designed to reduce the barriers that often prevent smaller or less experienced organizations, such as freelancers, start-ups, and non-profits, from successfully applying for funding.

Ultimately, the Sustainability Funding Schemes Toolkit aims to shift perceptions, helping CCSIs view sustainability not as a financial burden or administrative challenge, but as a strategic opportunity to enhance their resilience, visibility, and long-term success.

2__THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR CCSIS

2. The Funding Landscape for CCSIs

2.1 What is Funding? …and What It isn't

In the cultural and creative sectors, funding is often seen as **a way to make projects possible that could not otherwise exist**. For many artists, cultural organizations, or small creative enterprises, securing financial support can feel like a breakthrough moment, the difference between an idea and its realization. Yet, while funding indeed represents an **opportunity**, it is also a **commitment**. Understanding what funding truly is, and what it is not, is essential for approaching it strategically and responsibly.

Funding is not free money. It is a strategic instrument that comes with **expectations**, **obligations**, and **accountability**. Whether it comes from a public grant, a private foundation, or an investor, funding always involves a relationship between the funder and the recipient, based on shared objectives, clear deliverables, and mutual trust. Funders provide resources to help achieve specific outcomes, social, cultural, environmental, or economic, and in return, they expect evidence that those outcomes have been delivered. This often means adhering to administrative rules, keeping accurate financial records, submitting reports, and communicating progress transparently.

Think of funding as an **investment in your vision**. When a foundation, government agency, or impact investor decides to support your project, they're essentially saying: *"We believe in what you're doing, and we want to help you make it happen."* But in return, they expect you to:

- Deliver what you promised. Your project outcomes need to match what you outlined in your application
- Manage the money responsibly. Every euro spent should be accounted for and justified
- Report on your progress. Funders want to know how their investment is making a difference
- Communicate your impact. Share your successes (and challenges) with transparency

For creative and cultural organizations, **this can sometimes feel like a constraint**. But in reality, these obligations are what make funding a powerful strategic tool. Preparing an application forces organizations to articulate their vision, define measurable goals, and think critically about their impact. Managing a funded project can strengthen financial discipline, improve collaboration, and enhance the organization's professional credibility. In this sense, funding is not only a means of support, but also a **mechanism for growth and transformation.**

In the context of this toolkit, funding refers specifically to financial mechanisms that **enable CCSIs to advance sustainability goals, environmental, social, or governmental**. This includes grants or investments that support actions such as reducing environmental impact, adopting circular production practices, promoting social inclusion, engaging communities, or building more resilient business models. These sustainability-focused funds are designed to help CCSIs contribute to wider societal goals while enhancing their own long-term viability.

It is also important to note that funding comes in many forms. While most creative professionals are familiar with **grants**, other types of financial support exist, including low-interest loans, sponsorships, impact investment, crowdfunding, or in-kind contributions such as space, equipment, or mentorship. Understanding the nature of each type — and the responsibilities attached — helps organizations choose the most suitable path for their needs and capacities.

Approaching funding strategically means going beyond "where to find money." It means understanding why a funder is offering support, what values or priorities they aim to advance, and how your project aligns with them. Successful applicants are those who can connect their creative mission with the funder's sustainability objectives, present a realistic plan, and demonstrate accountability. When viewed in this way, funding becomes not just a source of finance but a partnership — a collaboration between creativity and purpose that can deliver lasting positive impact.

At a Glance. Type of Funding.

TYPE OF FUNDING	WHAT IT MEANS	TYPICAL RESPONSIBILITIES	RELEVANCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY
Grants	Non-repayable funds from public or private bodies to support specific projects.	Deliver the agreed activities; report on outputs and spending.	Common in sustainability and innovation initiatives (EU/national funds).
Loans / Microcredit	Repayable financing, often with low interest or favourable conditions.	Repayment, financial reporting, proof of project feasibility.	Useful for scaling sustainable practices or infrastructure investments.
Sponsorship / CSR	Support from companies seeking alignment with social or environmental values.	Visibility for sponsor, proof of impact, partnership management.	Ideal for creative sustainability campaigns or public events.

Impact Investment	Investors fund organizations that create measurable social/environmental benefits.	Clear impact metrics and business sustainability.	High potential for long-term sustainability innovation.
Crowdfunding	Community-based fundraising from multiple small contributors.	Transparent communication, delivering promised rewards or outcomes.	Engages citizens directly in sustainability-oriented creative projects.
In-kind Support	Non-financial assistance such as space, equipment, or mentoring.	Appropriate use and acknowledgment of support.	Often complements sustainability initiatives, especially for start-ups.

2.2 Overview of Funding Types for CCSIs

The cultural and creative sectors have **traditionally relied on a mix of public grants, private sponsorships, and self-generated income**. In recent years, however, the funding landscape has become more **diverse, dynamic, and responsive** to global challenges — especially those related to sustainability, inclusion, and innovation.

Today, creative organizations can **access funding from a wide variety of sources**, each with different expectations, priorities, and procedures. Understanding these distinctions helps organizations identify where they best fit and how to approach potential funders strategically.

Below is an overview of the main funding types available to CCSIs, with a focus on their growing connection to sustainability-driven initiatives.

Public Funding: Policy-Driven Investment

What it is: Grants and subsidies from EU institutions, national governments, regional authorities, and local municipalities.

What drives them: Public funders are increasingly aligning their priorities with major EU policy frameworks. Public authorities prioritize funding that aligns with the European Green Deal, the New European Bauhaus, and other sustainability-related frameworks. They're not just supporting culture—they're using culture as a vehicle to achieve broader societal goals like climate action, social inclusion, and democratic engagement.

What this means for you: Your project needs to clearly demonstrate how it contributes to these larger policy objectives. Think beyond your immediate creative goals and consider how your work can advance environmental sustainability, social cohesion, or community resilience.

Private Funding: Mission-Aligned Support

What it is: Support from philanthropic foundations, corporate sponsors, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) programs, and private donors.

What drives them: Corporate foundations and impact investors are expanding their portfolios to include cultural projects that deliver measurable social or environmental impact. They're looking for partnerships where their investment creates both cultural value and tangible improvements in society or the environment.

What this means for you: Research potential funders' missions carefully. A foundation focused on education might fund your community arts program that teaches sustainable practices. A corporation committed to carbon neutrality might sponsor your zero-waste festival. The key is alignment—showing how your project advances their specific goals.

Alternative and Innovative Financial Mechanisms

What it is: Financial mechanisms that complement traditional public and private funding, including crowdfunding, impact investment, social impact bonds, blended finance, and cooperative models.

What drives them: These funders often seek both social/environmental returns and financial sustainability. Crowdfunding and blended finance models are particularly well-suited for creative projects with strong community and sustainability dimensions. They're attracted to projects that can engage audiences directly and demonstrate clear, measurable outcomes.

What this means for you: These models require you to think like both an artist and an entrepreneur. You need compelling storytelling for crowdfunding campaigns, clear impact metrics for social investors, and sustainable business models that can generate ongoing returns.

The Sustainability Advantage

Here's the encouraging reality: sustainability is no longer a niche interest. It's becoming central to how funders evaluate projects across all categories. Whether it's a public authority advancing climate goals, a foundation promoting social equity, or an impact investor seeking measurable change, sustainability considerations are increasingly built into funding criteria.

This means your sustainable creative project isn't competing in a small, specialized pool it's positioned to access a growing range of funding opportunities across the entire landscape.

At a Glance: Comparing Funding Types for CCSIs.

FUNDING TYPE	TYPICAL SOURCE	MAIN ADVANTAGES	MAIN CHALLENGES	SUSTAINABILITY RELEVANCE
Public Funding	EU, national, regional, and local authorities	Legitimacy, stability, often large-scale support, alignment with policy priorities	High competition, administrative complexity, reimbursement-based payments	Strong focus on green, social, and inclusive transformation (e.g. Green Deal, NEB)
Private Funding	Companies, foundations, philanthropies, investors	Flexibility, faster decision-making, potential for partnerships and visibility	Requires strong storytelling and measurable impact; often relationship-based	Increasing interest in CSR, ESG, and creative sustainability partnerships
Alternative Funding	Citizens, communities, blended finance mechanisms	Builds engagement, diversifies income, encourages autonomy	Time-intensive campaigns; requires good communication and digital presence	Excellent fit for projects with social or environmental innovation dimensions

2.3 Organizational Readiness

Before applying for funding, every creative or cultural organization — regardless of size or structure — should take a moment to assess its internal readiness. Funders, especially those supporting sustainability initiatives, are not only evaluating what a project proposes to do, but also who is behind it and whether they can deliver it successfully.

Being **"funding-ready"** means having the **legal, financial, and operational foundations** to manage a project responsibly. For sustainability-focused funding, readiness also involves showing that your organization understands and practices environmental and social responsibility in its own operations.

The following three dimensions — legal structure, financial basics, and project definition — represent the essential building blocks of readiness.

Legal Structure: Are You Eligible?

Your **legal status** is often the first filter that determines your eligibility for different funding opportunities. It's not just bureaucracy—it's about how funders can legally transfer money to you and what obligations you can officially commit to.

- **If you're a freelancer or sole trader**, you're eligible for many individual artist grants and smaller project funds, but larger institutional grants may be off-limits. Some EU programs require you to partner with registered organizations. The advantage? Quick decision-making and full creative control.
- **If you're a registered association or NGO**, you have access to a wider range of grants, especially those focused on community benefit and social impact. Many sustainability-focused funders prefer non-profits because their missions align with public good objectives.
- **If you're an SME (Small/Medium Enterprise)**, you can access business development funds, innovation grants, and investment opportunities that aren't available to non-profits. Impact investors and corporate funders often prefer working with enterprises that can demonstrate financial sustainability.

Different legal structures unlock different funding doors. If you're currently limited by your status, consider whether partnership with a suitable organization or changing your structure might open new opportunities—but always weigh this against your creative autonomy and administrative capacity.

Financial Basics: Laying the Groundwork

A strong creative idea is not enough. Funders want to know that you can **manage their money transparently and responsibly**. Even the most innovative sustainability project needs solid financial management.

Before applying, make sure your organization can meet these basic financial conditions:

- A **Dedicated bank account** allows transparent tracking of project transactions and prevents mixing personal and project-related funds.
- A **Bookkeeping system**, a digital accounting tool or even a simple spreadsheet, helps record income and expenses accurately.
- Be able to demonstrate a **clear financial overview,** in other words where your income comes from, what your recurring costs are, and how your budget aligns with your activities.
- It is also wise to think about **cash flow**. Many grants reimburse expenses after they are incurred, meaning that your organization must have some liquidity or partnership arrangements to pre-finance activities. Anticipating this helps avoid project delays and stress later.

For **sustainability projects**, financial transparency also helps demonstrate ethical management — funders often value organizations that show integrity and accountability. More funders are asking for evidence of financial sustainability alongside environmental/social impact. Can you show how this project contributes to your long-term viability, not just your short-term needs?

Defining Your Project: From Idea to Fundable Plan

This is where creativity meets strategy. Funders don't just support good ideas—they support well-defined projects with clear goals, realistic timelines, and measurable outcomes. A fundable project is a structured plan that translates vision into **specific actions, measurable goals, and realistic budgets**.

Funders need to see that your concept can be delivered within the available time and resources, and that it contributes to clear sustainability outcomes.

When defining your project, start by **identifying the problem or opportunity** your initiative addresses. What sustainability challenge are you responding to — reducing waste, promoting inclusion, enhancing awareness, or developing sustainable materials? From there, translate your idea into a set of tangible objectives, actions, and results. A good project narrative explains not only what you will do but why it matters, who will benefit, and how the impact will be measured.

Building a **coherent budget** that matches your planned activities is another key step. The budget should reflect a realistic assessment of costs, including personnel, materials, communication, and potential overheads. Funders appreciate clarity and consistency: each expense should link logically to an activity described in your proposal. Where co-funding or partnerships are involved, outline these contributions clearly — they show commitment and strengthen your credibility.

Finally, think about **impact** from the start. For sustainability-oriented projects, impact means more than artistic excellence or audience reach; it involves contributing to environmental responsibility, social inclusion, or cultural resilience. Define how you will track or demonstrate this impact — even simple indicators, such as reduced waste, participation levels, or new collaborations, can be powerful evidence of success.

Leveraging CreaSus Tools for Enhanced Readiness

The **CreaSus project** offers two complementary tools that can significantly strengthen your organizational and project readiness, giving you concrete evidence of your sustainability commitment when approaching funders.

The CreaSus Sustainability Assessment Tool allows you to systematically evaluate your current ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices across all aspects of your operations. This comprehensive self-assessment covers the **three pillars of sustainability** (environmental, social, and governmental). More than just an internal reflection exercise, completing this assessment and using your results when drafting your funding proposal, provides you with **documented evidence of your sustainability baseline and commitment**. This can be powerful supporting material when applying for funding. Funders increasingly want to see that applicants understand their current impact and have a clear vision for improvement—the CreaSus assessment gives you exactly that foundation.

The Transformation Actions Tool complements the assessment by providing **practical, CCSIs-specific sustainability actions** based on good practices and successful cases from across the EU. Rather than starting from scratch when defining your project's sustainability components, you can draw from proven examples and adapt them to your specific context. This tool helps you move from general sustainability aspirations to concrete, implementable actions that align with funder priorities. The examples and resources available through this tool can significantly strengthen your project definition and demonstrate to funders that your sustainability goals are realistic and achievable.

Using both tools together—first to assess your current position, then to identify specific transformation actions—you create a compelling narrative for funders: **you know where**

you are, you know where you want to go, and you have a practical roadmap to get there. This evidence-based approach to sustainability not only enhances your funding applications but also ensures you're genuinely prepared to deliver on your promises once funding is secured.

2.4 Common Eligibility and Application Challenges

Even the most creative and well-prepared organizations encounter obstacles when applying for funding. The process can be competitive, time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating — especially for smaller CCSIs with limited administrative capacity. However, understanding the most common challenges in advance can help you prepare effectively and approach the process with confidence.

Below are some of the main barriers faced by cultural and creative organizations when seeking funding for sustainability-related projects, along with advice on how to overcome them.

Increasing Competition

Funding calls almost always attract far more applicants than the available budget can support. This is particularly true for EU-level programmes, where hundreds of high-quality proposals may compete for the same opportunity. While this reality can be discouraging, it should not stop you from applying. Instead, it's an invitation to **sharpen your proposal**.

Successful applications stand out because they are clear, focused, and aligned with the funder's priorities. Before applying, study the call carefully: what specific goals does it target? Tailor your project so that it directly contributes to those objectives, rather than trying to fit every possible theme. Clarity, coherence, and relevance are often more powerful than complexity.

Finally, treat each application as a **learning opportunity**. Even if you are not selected, feedback from evaluators can be extremely valuable for improving your next submission.

Complex Applications

Funding applications can be detailed and bureaucratic, often requiring what many call "grant-jargon" — structured language that aligns with funders' expectations. Forms may request technical details, logical frameworks, or performance indicators that feel

unfamiliar to creative professionals. This complexity is not meant to discourage applicants but to ensure transparency and accountability in how funds are distributed.

To navigate this, approach the application process step by step. Begin by outlining your project in plain language: what you want to do, why it matters, and how it will make a difference. Then, adapt that narrative to the terminology used by the funding programme. Most calls provide **guidelines or examples of successful applications**, studying these can help you understand what reviewers are looking for.

You can also seek support from intermediary organizations, such as creative networks, cultural agencies, or regional contact points, which often provide advice or training on how to prepare applications. Within the CreaSus project, additional guidance and examples will be available through the **Capacity Building Programme** later in the project. Writing a good application is a skill that improves with practice.

The Co-Funding Question

Many funding schemes, especially public ones, do not cover 100% of project costs. Applicants are often required to provide a **co-funding contribution**, which can range from 10% to 50% of the total budget. This requirement demonstrates commitment and ensures that multiple stakeholders share the project's risks and benefits.

For small or emerging CCSIs, co-funding can seem like a major obstacle. However, there are creative ways to approach it. In some cases, but not in all, co-funding does not always have to be financial, it can also include **in-kind contributions**, such as cost of staff your organisation already has, volunteer time, use of equipment, donated space, or existing resources that have monetary value. Documenting these properly can often meet part of the co-funding requirement.

Thinking strategically about co-funding can strengthen your proposal and show that your project has broad support and sustainability beyond a single grant.

Cash Flow and Reimbursement

One of the most common practical challenges for CCSIs is managing **cash flow**. Many grants operate on a reimbursement basis, meaning you must pay for expenses upfront and then submit documentation to be reimbursed later. This can create short-term financial strain, especially for smaller organizations or freelancers.

Good financial planning is essential. Before starting a project, review your budget carefully and identify how you will handle the initial expenses. You might need to use

savings, secure an advance payment from partners, or explore microcredit or short-term support from financial institutions. Some public programmes allow an initial pre-financing payment (for example, 30–40% of the total grant) to help with liquidity. **Always check the terms of the specific call, so you don't face unpleasant surprises**.

Planning your expenditure timeline and maintaining clear documentation of all expenses will help ensure smooth reimbursement. Treat the funder's money as a partnership resource, manage it carefully and transparently, and you will build trust that can lead to future opportunities.

The Burden of Reporting

Every funding source requires accountability. Reporting, both narrative and financial, is how funders verify that the money was used correctly and that the intended impact was achieved. While this can feel burdensome, it is also an opportunity to **showcase your achievements** and reflect on your learning.

To make reporting easier, start early. Keep track of expenses, attendance figures, communication outputs, and sustainability indicators as you go, don't wait until the end of the project. If possible, assign someone in your team to oversee documentation and data collection from the start.

Many funders now emphasize impact reporting rather than only outputs. For sustainability-oriented projects, this means demonstrating not just what you did, but the difference it made, for example, how you reduced waste, improved energy efficiency, or created inclusive opportunities. Use visuals, stories, and data to make your report engaging and credible.

Reporting should not be seen as an administrative chore but as a **reflection and communication tool**. It helps you understand your impact, celebrate your results, and strengthen your organization's reputation for professionalism and transparency.

The Advantages

Here's the encouraging news. **Sustainability projects often have advantages** in overcoming these challenges. Environmental and social impact are increasingly prioritized, sustainability projects naturally involve community partnerships, measurable outcomes are often built into environmental work, and the growing focus on sustainability means more funding opportunities are becoming available.

These **challenges are real, but they're not unbeatable**. Every successful CCSI has navigated them, and with good preparation, you can too. The key is understanding them as part of the process, not barriers to avoid.

2.5 Funding Sustainability in CCSIs

Sustainability has become a key priority across Europe, shaping public policies, investment strategies, and funding programmes. Initiatives such as the **European Green Deal,** the **New European Bauhaus**, and various national sustainability frameworks increasingly influence how funding opportunities are designed and evaluated. As a result, Cultural and Creative Sector Organisations that **integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into their projects**, are often better positioned to access a wider range of financial support.

For CCSIs, sustainability can take many forms. **Environmental actions** may include reducing the ecological footprint of cultural production, adopting circular design practices, using sustainable materials, or improving energy efficiency in creative spaces. **Social sustainability** may involve increasing accessibility to cultural activities, promoting diversity and inclusion, or strengthening community participation. **Governance-related improvements** may focus on transparent management practices, responsible partnerships, and long-term organisational resilience. Funding schemes increasingly recognise these dimensions as part of broader societal transformation.

Understanding **how sustainability connects to funding opportunities** is therefore essential when designing projects and preparing proposals. Many funding schemes do not explicitly label themselves as "sustainability funds," yet they include sustainability-related criteria in their evaluation processes. Demonstrating how a project contributes to environmental responsibility, social inclusion, or responsible governance can significantly strengthen an application and improve its chances of success.

From a practical perspective, organisations can **strengthen their funding applications** by clearly demonstrating how sustainability is embedded in their projects. This can be achieved by:

- **Defining a clear sustainability objective**, such as reducing environmental impact, improving accessibility, or strengthening community engagement.
- **Connecting project activities to measurable outcomes**, for example through indicators related to resource efficiency, participation, or social impact.
- **Demonstrating alignment with policy priorities**, such as the European Green Deal, circular economy principles, or inclusive cultural participation.

- **Showing long-term value**, explaining how the project contributes to sustainable practices beyond the duration of the funded activities.

In practice, integrating sustainability into project design is increasingly a prerequisite for accessing many types of funding. Public programmes often prioritise projects that contribute to environmental transition or social inclusion, while private foundations and impact-oriented investors are increasingly interested in initiatives that demonstrate measurable positive change. This means that sustainability should not be seen as an additional requirement but as an integral part of project development and strategic planning. In the table bellow you may find examples of Sustainability Priorities and Related Funding Opportunities for CCSIs

FOCUS	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES
Environmental Sustainability	Eco-design, circular production methods, sustainable materials, energy-efficient cultural spaces	EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe, LIFE), national green transition funds, environmental foundations
Social Sustainability	Cultural accessibility, community-based projects, inclusion of underrepresented groups, participatory cultural activities	Public cultural funds, social innovation programmes, philanthropic foundations
Governance Sustainability	Ethical partnerships, transparent management practices, sustainable organisational strategies	EU cooperation programmes, CSR partnerships, private foundations, blended finance mechanisms

Understanding this connection allows CCSIs to approach funding opportunities more strategically and to design projects that are both financially viable and socially meaningful.

3__FUNDING GUIDE BY CATEGORY

3. Funding Guide by Category

Now that you understand the funding landscape and have assessed your readiness, let's dive into the **specific opportunities** available for your sustainability projects. This chapter provides a practical overview of funding sources organized by category, helping you identify which opportunities best match your needs, legal structure, and project scope.

There are many ways to access funding for sustainability initiatives in the cultural and creative sectors. However, not all funding sources are the same. They differ in scope, eligibility, size, and focus, and understanding these differences is key to identifying opportunities that truly fit your organization's capacity and goals. Broadly speaking, funding can be divided into three categories:

1. **EU-level funding**, which supports transnational collaboration and innovation across Member States;
2. **National and regional funding**, which focuses on local development and sector-specific growth;
3. **Private and alternative mechanisms**, such as corporate partnerships, crowdfunding, and impact investing, which offer flexible and innovative ways to finance sustainability projects.

In this Chapter, funding is organized according to **practical access pathways** (EU-level, national/regional, and private or alternative mechanisms) to help users navigate opportunities more easily.

Each of these categories can play a unique role in your funding strategy. Many successful organizations combine them, using smaller national funds to prepare projects that later scale through European or private investment.

3.1 EU-Level Funding

At the European level, several programmes and initiatives support sustainability and innovation in the cultural and creative sectors. These funds are designed to encourage cross-border collaboration, foster excellence, and align with broader EU policy objectives such as the **European Green Deal**, the **New European Bauhaus**, and the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

EU-level funding is ideal for projects that:

- Involve partners from multiple EU countries;
- Contribute to environmental or social impact at a European scale;
- Explore innovation, research, or policy development in CCSIs.

Key Characteristics

EU funds are typically distributed through **calls for proposals** or **framework programmes**. They often have clear annual or multi-annual work plans outlining priorities, eligibility, and expected results. Applications can be competitive, but they offer substantial support and international visibility.

Examples of key EU programmes include:

- **Creative Europe:** The EU's main programme for the cultural and creative sectors. It funds cross-border cooperation, innovation, audience development, and — increasingly — sustainability-driven initiatives.
- **Horizon Europe:** The EU's research and innovation framework programme. It supports projects exploring sustainable materials, digital transformation, green technologies, and social innovation — all areas relevant to creative industries.
- **Interreg Europe and Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes:** These funds focus on regional development, innovation, and sustainability through transnational cooperation.
- **LIFE Programme:** The EU's dedicated environmental and climate action fund, which can support creative projects with strong sustainability components.
- **ERASMUS+ Programme.** This funding scheme can directly support projects that are focusing on training, skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling of your target groups.
- **European Social Fund (ESF+) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF):** These funds can indirectly support creative entrepreneurship, training, and green infrastructure at local and regional levels.

ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
• High visibility and prestige; • Larger-scale budgets supporting multi-year activities; • Opportunities for networking and partnership building across Europe. • Strong alignment with EU sustainability priorities.	• Administrative complexity and long timelines; • Requires partnerships and international coordination; • Intense competition — only the most relevant and well-prepared proposals succeed.

Success Strategies

You must **Think European**, and your project must demonstrate clear cross-border impact and European added value.

Study current **EU priorities** and allign accordingly. Projects that explicitly contribute to initiatives like the European Green Deal, Digital Decade, or European Pillar of Social Rights have significant advantages.

Build Strong Partnerships which is essential for most EU programs require partnerships. Seek collaborators from different member states who bring complementary expertise and demonstrate the European dimension of your work.

EU funding seeks projects that go beyond existing practices. **Demonstrate Innovation**, and clearly present what new approaches, technologies, or methodologies are you introducing to the sector.

Tip:

If you are new to EU funding, consider starting as a partner rather than a lead applicant. This allows you to gain experience and build networks before managing a full project yourself.

3.2 National and Regional Funding

While EU-level funding offers scale and visibility, **national and regional programmes** are often the most accessible starting point for CCSIs. These funds are typically managed by ministries of culture, environment, or economic development, as well as by regional governments and local authorities. They can take the form of grants, subsidies, or tax incentives aimed at supporting sustainable development within the creative economy.

National and regional programmes vary widely between countries, but most share common objectives: strengthening local creative ecosystems, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainability as a driver of economic and social growth. For example, a national cultural fund may support eco-design projects, or a regional development agency might finance circular economy initiatives in creative production.

These schemes often have **simpler application processes** than EU funds, and they prioritize projects with local impact. They may also provide **co-funding opportunities** that can later be combined with European programmes.

How to Approach National and Regional Funding

1. **Stay Informed.** Follow the websites of your ministry of culture, regional creative hubs, or national contact points for updates on open calls.
2. **Build Relationships.** Attending national info days, workshops, or networking events helps you understand priorities and establish direct contact with programme managers.
3. **Leverage Local Networks.** Collaborate with nearby institutions or municipalities that already have experience in project management.
4. **Show Impact Locally.** Demonstrate how your sustainability project benefits your community, region, or cultural ecosystem. Funders value tangible, localized results.

ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
• Easier access and lower competition compared to EU funds; • Better understanding of local context and needs by funders; • Opportunities to test and refine ideas before scaling up.	• Smaller grant sizes and shorter implementation periods; • Limited to specific regions or target groups; • Funding priorities may change with political cycles.

National and regional funding is a **powerful stepping stone** — an ideal way to pilot innovative sustainability actions, build credibility, and gather the evidence needed to approach larger-scale opportunities later on.

Success Strategies

Always **know Your Local Landscape**. Research your region's specific sustainability priorities. Coastal areas might prioritize marine environmental issues, while industrial regions might focus on circular economy transitions.

Regional funders value projects that **build Local Partnerships** and strengthen local ecosystems. Partner with environmental organizations, community groups, or educational institutions in your area.

Show how your project **demonstrates Local Impact** and how it addresses specific local challenges while contributing to broader sustainability goals.

3.3 Private and Alternative Funding Mechanisms

Beyond public institutions, a growing number of **private and community-based funding models** support sustainability in the creative economy. These include corporate sponsorship, philanthropic foundations, impact investment, and crowdfunding platforms. They offer greater flexibility and creative freedom, but they also require proactive relationship-building and strong communication skills.

Private and Corporate Funding

Many companies are aligning their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) strategies with the arts. This means they actively seek cultural partners who can help express sustainability values through creativity, design, or storytelling. Partnerships of this kind can take the form of direct sponsorship, co-creation, or long-term collaboration.

Corporate Sponsorships

Corporate sponsorship represents a common form of private funding in the cultural and creative sectors. In this model, companies provide financial or in-kind support to cultural projects, events, or organisations in exchange for visibility, brand association, or opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Sponsorship agreements often involve communication and promotional elements such as logo placement, public acknowledgement, or collaborative campaigns.

For cultural and creative organisations, corporate sponsorships can be particularly relevant for festivals, exhibitions, creative events, digital initiatives, or community engagement projects that align with a company's values or target audiences. Building successful sponsorship partnerships typically requires a clear proposal that demonstrates the mutual benefits of collaboration, including audience reach, brand alignment, and positive social or environmental impact.

Foundation and Philanthropic Grants

In contrast to corporate sponsorships, funding from foundations and philanthropic organisations is generally **mission-driven rather than marketing-oriented**. Foundations typically support projects that align with their thematic priorities, such as cultural development, social inclusion, education, sustainability, or community engagement.

For CCSIs, foundation funding can support artistic creation, cultural accessibility initiatives, educational programmes, or projects addressing social or environmental challenges through culture and creativity. Applications for

foundation grants usually require organisations to demonstrate how their project contributes to the foundation's mission and long-term goals. Unlike corporate sponsorships, these funding relationships often focus less on visibility and more on the cultural, social, or environmental value generated by the project.

When approaching private funders, emphasize mutual benefit and specifically how your project supports their mission, enhances their reputation, or engages their stakeholders.

HOW TO APPROACH THEM	• Research their CSR reports and sustainability commitments • Propose projects that create mutual benefits—impact for you, reputation and employee engagement for them • Think locally—many companies prioritize supporting communities where they operate • Offer recognition and visibility opportunities • Look for foundations that explicitly welcome cultural approaches to their core issues

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding allows creative professionals to raise small contributions from a large number of individuals who believe in their idea. It combines financing with audience development and is particularly effective for sustainability projects that inspire emotional engagement, such as community gardens, eco-art installations, or social design initiatives.

Dedicated online Platforms (eg Kickstarter, Ulule, Indiegogo) provide accessible ways to launch campaigns, while specialized platforms (e.g., Goteo, focusing on social innovation) cater to sustainability-oriented projects. A successful campaign requires planning, storytelling, and regular communication with supporters, but it also builds community ownership and awareness of your cause.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES	• Tell compelling stories that connect personal experience to broader sustainability challenges • Use your creative skills—high-quality videos, images, and design make huge differences • Offer meaningful rewards that align with your sustainability message • Engage your existing community first, then expand outward • Be transparent about how funds will create specific impacts

Impact Investment

Impact investment refers to funding from investors who seek measurable social and environmental benefits alongside financial returns. This model is gaining traction across Europe as creative businesses develop sustainable products, ethical supply chains, or socially inclusive services. Impact investors look for organizations with clear impact metrics, viable business models, and strong governance.

For CCSIs, this may mean developing hybrid models that combine creativity, entrepreneurship, and sustainability — such as fashion brands using recycled materials, design studios focused on accessibility, or creative hubs supporting circular economy solutions.

WHAT THEY LOOK FOR	• Clear social or environmental impact metrics • Pathway to financial sustainability (not necessarily profit, but operational viability) • Innovative approaches that could be replicated or scaled • Strong management teams with relevant experience

Each funding category offers unique opportunities — and each requires a slightly different mindset. EU-level funds demand strategy, collaboration, and patience. National and regional programmes reward proximity and community impact. Private and innovative mechanisms call for creativity, persuasion, and partnership-building.

ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
• Greater flexibility and innovation potential; • Opportunities for long-term collaboration and co-creation; • Strong alignment with sustainability and social impact values; • Builds direct community and audience relationships.	• Requires strong storytelling and marketing skills; • Financial risks and administrative demands vary by model; • Success depends on visibility, credibility, and trust-building.

Investors, Angels, Seed Funding and Financial Institutions

When seeking funding from private investors, foundations, corporate partners, or early-stage investors such as angel investors and venture capital funds, organisations should

be prepared to provide a higher level of transparency and documentation than is often required for grant-based funding. Investors and private funders typically conduct some form of due diligence before committing financial resources, which means they will want to understand the organisation's structure, financial stability, and the potential impact of the proposed project.

For Organisations exploring private or mixed funding opportunities, it is therefore useful to prepare a basic set of documents in advance. This preparation helps build credibility and allows discussions with potential partners to progress more efficiently. Key elements that organisations should consider preparing include:

- **Organisational information**: legal status, governance structure, and a brief description of the organisation's mission and activities.
- **Financial information**: recent financial statements or summaries, current budget structure, and an overview of income sources.
- **Project documentation**: a concise concept note or project proposal describing objectives, activities, expected outcomes, and funding needs.
- **Impact and sustainability rationale**: a clear explanation of how the project contributes to environmental, social, or cultural sustainability goals.
- **Supporting materials**: presentations, visual materials, or short pitch documents that help communicate the project effectively.

In addition to traditional sponsorships or philanthropic funding, creative organisations (particularly those operating in digital or creative technology fields) may also encounter opportunities through innovation contests, hackathons, accelerator programmes, or entrepreneurial competitions organised by banks, foundations, technology hubs, and private investors. These initiatives often aim to identify innovative and scalable ideas that can develop into creative start-ups or new cultural services. For organisations working in areas such as game development, digital design, immersive media, or creative platforms, participating in such initiatives can open pathways to seed funding, mentorship, or incubation programmes.

In these contexts, organisations are often expected to present their idea through a short pitch or pitch deck, which summarises the project's value proposition, innovation potential, and development strategy. In the table below, you may find the main information you should provide during a Pitch presentation:

PITCH DECK SECTION	PURPOSE	PITCH DECK SECTION	PURPOSE
1. Problem or Opportunity	Explain the challenge or need your project addresses.	**6. Development Roadmap**	Present key milestones for development and implementation.

2. Solution / Creative Concept	Describe the creative product, service, or innovation you are proposing.	**7. Team and Expertise**	Introduce the people behind the project and their experience.
3. Market or Audience	Identify the target audience, users, or cultural market segment.	**8. Impact and Sustainability**	Highlight environmental, social, or cultural value created by the project.
4. Value Proposition	Explain what makes the project unique and why it matters.	**9. Funding Needs**	Explain how much funding is required and how it will be used.
5. Business or Sustainability Model	Outline how the project will generate revenue or sustain operations.		

Finding Your Funding Mix

Most successful sustainability projects combine funding from multiple sources. An EU grant might cover development costs, regional funding could support implementation, corporate sponsorship might provide equipment, and crowdfunding could engage community supporters. This diversified approach reduces risk and demonstrates broad support for your work.

At a Glance: Comparing Funding Categories

FUNDING CATEGORY	SCOPE	BEST FOR	FUNDING SIZE	SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS
EU-Level Funding	Transnational, European	Collaborative projects, innovation, research	Medium – Large	Strong alignment with EU sustainability policies (Green Deal, NEB, SDGs)
National & Regional Funding	Country or region-specific	Local sustainability actions, pilot projects	Small – Medium	Varies by country, often linked to cultural and environmental strategies
Private & Innovative Funding	Corporate, community, or investor-based	Creative entrepreneurship, community engagement, impact projects	Flexible	Driven by CSR, ESG, or grassroots sustainability movements

4__DECISION MAKING SUPPORT TOOLS

4. Decision-Making Support Tools

By now, you have a solid understanding of the funding landscape and what it takes to be funding ready. But with so many options available—from EU programs to crowdfunding, from corporate sponsorships to impact investment—**how do you decide where to focus your energy?**

This chapter transforms information into **action**. Rather than leaving you to navigate countless funding opportunities on your own, we provide structured tools that help you identify the most promising pathways for your specific situation.

Here, you will find tools designed to help you **identify which funding pathways best match your profile, capacity, and sustainability ambitions**.

The following sections guide you step by step: first, by helping you understand the main criteria funders use when evaluating applicants; then, by offering visual tools — a **decision matrix** and a **flowchart** — to narrow down your options; and finally, by providing tailored guidance for **different types of entities**, from freelancers to SMEs and non-profits.

4.1 Choosing the Right Funding Pathway

Choosing the right funding opportunity is not only about finding where the money is, it's about finding the **best fit** between your organization's mission, capacity, and the goals of the funder. A well-chosen funding pathway allows you to focus your energy, increase your success rate, and build long-term relationships with funders who share your values. The process begins with understanding your own position: where you are today, what kind of project you want to deliver, and what resources and partnerships you already have in place.

Every funder, whether public, private, or community-based, is motivated by a particular set of objectives. Some aim to strengthen innovation or entrepreneurship, others focus on cultural participation, while more and more are guided by **sustainability principles** like environmental protection, social inclusion, or governance transparency. When your project clearly contributes to a funder's mission, it has a much greater chance of success. The key is to **match your project's purpose to the right funding logic**.

A strategic approach to decision-making involves three key steps:

1. **Know Yourself:** Assess your organization's readiness, using tools like the CreaSus Self-Assessment Tool to identify your strengths and areas for improvement. Understand your legal structure, size, and financial capacity, bacause these factors directly influence your eligibility for different funding types.
2. **Define Your Project Clearly:** Clarify your sustainability goals and expected outcomes. Ask yourself: what problem does my project address, and what measurable change will it create? A well-defined project makes it easier to identify funders who share your priorities.
3. **Match and Prioritize:** Once you understand your internal profile and external goals, map them against the available funding pathways. Some opportunities may align closely with your project type, while others may not be a good fit. It is better to apply selectively to the right opportunities than to submit many unfocused applications.

Choosing the right funding pathway also means thinking **beyond a single call**. Many successful organizations build a diversified funding portfolio — starting locally to test ideas, then combining national, European, and private funding as their projects mature. This approach, sometimes called funding layering, spreads risk and increases resilience. For instance, a small design studio might begin with a regional innovation grant to prototype sustainable materials, then join an EU partnership under Creative Europe to scale their idea internationally, and later attract private impact investors for long-term development.

Finally, good decision-making is about **alignment and timing**. Opportunities change, but your mission should stay consistent. Stay informed about upcoming calls, plan your calendar around them, and allow enough time to prepare strong applications. Decision-making is not about reacting to every opportunity — it's about choosing the ones that will truly help you achieve your sustainability vision.

However, when combining different sources, it is essential to **avoid double funding**, by sing multiple grants to finance the same costs or activities. Most funding schemes explicitly prohibit this and may request verification that no overlapping support has been received for the same project or expenditure. Always ensure that each funding source covers distinct parts of your work and keep clear documentation to demonstrate compliance. Responsible management not only protects your organization's credibility but also strengthens your reputation with future funders.

4.2 Funding Decision Matrix

Once you have clarified your goals and understood your organizational profile, the next step is to identify which types of funding best align with your needs. Each funding source, whether public, private, or community-based, comes with different expectations, eligibility rules, and levels of support. Choosing wisely can save valuable time and resources and increase your chances of success.

The **Funding Decision Matrix** is designed to help you navigate these options. It summarizes which funding pathways are most suitable for various types of creative and cultural entities, based on their size, structure, and sustainability focus. The goal is not to tell you what to apply for, but to help you recognize where you fit best and which routes are worth exploring further.

How to Use the Funding Decision Matrix

The matrix helps you connect your **organizational profile** with the **funding environment** that suits it best. Start by identifying which category best describes your organization — for example, freelancer, SME, or non-profit association. Then look across the table to see which types of funding are most relevant to your scale, project type, and sustainability goals.

Each column gives you practical clues:

- "Recommended Funding Pathways" indicates which financial mechanisms are most compatible with your situation;
- "Sustainability Relevance" shows where your work can align with current funding trends;
- "Examples of Suitable Schemes" helps you identify specific programmes to start exploring.

You can use this tool as a **starting map**: once you find the areas that suit you, go deeper into those funding streams, review their specific eligibility criteria, and check for open calls. The matrix can also help you plan future development — showing where you might grow next as your organization gains experience and capacity.

Funding Decision Matrix for CCSIs

ENTITY TYPE	TYPICAL PROJECT FOCUS	SCALE / REACH	RECOMMENDED FUNDING PATHWAYS	SUSTAINABILITY RELEVANCE	EXAMPLES OF SUITABLE SCHEMES
Freelancers & Individual Creatives	Artistic creation, awareness campaigns, sustainable design, small community initiatives	Local to national	- Microgrants and individual artist funds - Local and regional cultural schemes - Crowdfunding - Partnerships with NGOs or institutions as fiscal sponsors	Strong on social and community sustainability (education, inclusion, awareness)	National arts councils, local cultural funds, civic crowdfunding platforms
Micro-enterprises & Start-ups	Innovation, product or service development, sustainable production methods	Regional to EU	Innovation grants (national or EU)- Green business or circular economy funding- Impact investment or accelerator programmes- Blended finance (public + private)	Strong in environmental and economic sustainability (eco-design, circular models)	Horizon Europe, LIFE Programme, national innovation agencies, creative incubators
SMEs in CCSIs	Business transformation , scaling sustainable operations, R&D	National to international	- R&D and innovation funds- ESG-aligned private investors- CSR partnerships- Export and digital transition funds	Balanced across environmental, social, and governance pillars	Interreg, ERDF programmes, impact funds, private foundations
Non-profits / Associations / Cooperatives	Community-based projects, inclusion, education, cultural awareness, sustainability awareness	Local to transnational	- Public grants (national or EU)- Foundations and philanthropic support- Public–private partnerships- Crowdfunding for community engagement	Strong in social sustainability and governance (community impact, transparency)	Creative Europe, Erasmus+, national cultural foundations, local authorities
Networks, Alliances & Clusters	Capacity building, knowledge exchange, cross-border cooperation, policy advocacy	European and international	- EU-level collaborative programmes- Transnational cooperation projects- Multi-stakeholder partnerships	Governance and systemic sustainability (collaboration, policy innovation)	Creative Europe Cooperation Projects, Interreg, COSME / Single Market Programme

Interpreting the Matrix

The Funding Decision Matrix is not a fixed formula, it's a **navigation aid** to help you make smarter, more strategic decisions. Once you identify the funding pathways that fit your organization, explore them further using the annexed lists of schemes, national examples, or EU-level databases.

Keep in mind that **multiple pathways can be combined** as your project evolves. For instance, you might use a local grant to test your idea, apply for an EU partnership to scale it, and later bring in private or community investors to ensure continuity.

4.3 Funding Flowchart: Which Funding Is Right for You?

The Funding Flowchart is a practical tool to identify which opportunities best fit your situation. It takes you step by step through a series of simple questions, (about your organization, your project, and your sustainability goals) to guide you toward the most appropriate funding pathways.

This tool does not replace detailed research or professional advice, but it helps you **make informed, confident first choices** about where to focus your energy. Whether you are an individual artist, a start-up, a cultural association, or a growing SME, following the flowchart will help you see which funding routes are most realistic and what preparations might be needed before applying.

How the Flowchart Works

The flowchart is structured as a sequence of **decision points**, each leading you toward a potential funding pathway. Begin at the top and move downward, following the answers that best describe your case.

Here's a simplified version of the logic behind it:

Step 1: What Type of Entity Are You?

- **Individual / Freelancer:** → Go to Step 2A
- **Registered Organization (SME, NGO, Cooperative, etc.):** → Go to Step 2B

Step 2A: For Individuals or Freelancers

- Is your project primarily artistic, community-oriented, or educational? → **Local or National Cultural Grants**, **Microfunding Schemes**, or **Crowdfunding** may fit best.

- Are you collaborating with others or working within a larger network or residency?
  → Consider **partnership-based opportunities** (e.g. through Creative Europe, Erasmus+, or national cultural mobility programmes).
- Do you need visibility or seed support rather than large budgets?
  → Explore **crowdfunding platforms** or **artist residencies** offering sustainability themes.

Step 2B: For Registered Organizations

- Is your organization **for-profit** (company, SME, start-up)?
  → Go to Step 3A.
- Is your organization **non-profit or cooperative** (association, foundation, social enterprise)?
  → Go to Step 3B.

Step 3A: For For-Profit Entities (SMEs, Start-Ups, Enterprises)

- Is your project focused on innovation, green transition, or sustainable production?
  → Look at **national innovation funds**, **EU-level programmes** such as Horizon Europe, or **impact investors**.
- Are you scaling or commercializing sustainable solutions?
  → Explore **private finance**, **accelerators**, or **blended finance** (mixing public and private support).
- Do you need early-stage support for a prototype or pilot?
  → Check **regional innovation grants** or **creative incubators**.

Step 3B: For Non-Profits, Associations, and Cooperatives

- Does your project create social, educational, or community impact?
  → Explore **public cultural funds**, **foundations**, and **EU cooperation projects** under Creative Europe or Erasmus+.
- Is your initiative focused on local sustainability or inclusion?
  → Consider **municipal or regional funds**, or **public–private partnerships** with local businesses.
- Are you working across borders or on policy-level advocacy?
  → Investigate **Interreg**, **Europe for Citizens**, or similar transnational programmes.

Step 4: Defining the Scale of Your Project

- **Local Impact (Community, Municipality):** → Local or regional public funds, civic crowdfunding, or partnerships.
- **National Impact (Sectoral or Country-Level):** → National ministries, cultural agencies, and private foundations.
- **European or International Impact:** → EU-level programmes, cooperation projects, and transnational innovation funds.

Step 5: Matching Your Sustainability Focus

Finally, consider which sustainability dimension your project addresses:

- **Environmental sustainability (green transition, circular economy):** → LIFE Programme, Horizon Europe, or green innovation funds.
- **Social sustainability (inclusion, participation, education):** → Creative Europe, Erasmus+, or national community funds.
- **Governance and long-term change (new business models, management innovation):** → Impact investment or cooperative development funds.

At the end of the flowchart, you'll reach one or more **recommended pathways** (the categories of funding most likely to fit your project).

Funding Flowchart

STEP	GUIDING QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER / SITUATION	SUGGESTED FUNDING DIRECTION	TYPICAL OPPORTUNITIES
1. Type of Entity	What type of organization are you?	Freelancer / Individual	Local & national microgrants, crowdfunding, artist residencies	Local cultural funds, civic crowdfunding, small sustainability art grants
		Registered Organization (company, NGO, cooperative, etc.)	Go to Step 2	—
2. Legal Status	Are you a for-profit or non-profit entity?	For-Profit (SME, start-up, enterprise)	Innovation and business-focused funding, impact investment	Horizon Europe, LIFE, national innovation agencies
		Non-Profit / Association / Cooperative	Community, education, and inclusion-focused funds	Creative Europe, Erasmus+, national or regional cultural funds
3. Project Type	What is the main goal of your project?	Innovation or Sustainable Product/Service	R&D and innovation funds, accelerators, blended finance	Horizon Europe, Green Transition Funds, Creative Business Cup
		Community or Social Engagement	Public grants, foundations, crowdfunding	Erasmus+, Interreg, foundations, civic platforms
		Artistic / Awareness Raising / Cultural Activity	Creative or cultural funds with sustainability themes	Creative Europe, local cultural funds, NEB initiatives
4. Scale of Project	What is the geographic reach of your project?	Local / Municipal	Local government grants, partnerships, crowdfunding	Municipal cultural departments, local foundations
		National	National cultural and innovation programmes	Ministries of Culture or Environment, national endowments
		European / International	EU-level collaborative funds and networks	Creative Europe, Interreg, Horizon Europe
5. Sustainability Focus	Which sustainability dimension does your project address?	Environmental (green practices, circular economy)	Green transition and climate action funds	LIFE Programme, Horizon Europe Cluster 5 & 6, national green grants
		Social (inclusion, education, participation)	Community-based and inclusive cultural funds	Erasmus+, Creative Europe, local inclusion funds
		Governance / Business Models (ESG, innovation)	Impact investment and cooperative development	Impact investors, social finance, cooperative development grants
6. Readiness Level	How prepared is your organization to manage funds?	Early-stage / Low capacity	Local or regional funds, microgrants, crowdfunding	National arts councils, pilot initiatives
		Experienced / High capacity	EU-level programmes, blended or private funding	Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, CSR programmes

4.4 Entity-Type Pathways

Not all creative and cultural organizations start from the same place. Freelancers, small companies, and non-profits each have unique strengths — and face different challenges when it comes to accessing funding. Recognizing your profile helps you target the right opportunities, manage expectations, and build a funding strategy that truly fits your capacity.

The following pathways provide **tailored guidance for three main CCSI profiles**. Each pathway highlights typical funding sources, common barriers, and practical steps to help you become more competitive and resilient.

Freelancers & Individual Creatives

Freelancers are the beating heart of the creative sector — musicians, visual artists, designers, filmmakers, writers, and digital creators who often work independently or in small collaborations. Their flexibility and creativity are strengths, but limited administrative capacity can make funding access difficult. Many public schemes are designed for registered entities, and eligibility rules often exclude individuals without legal status.

STRENGTHS	TYPICAL BARRIERS
• High adaptability and creative agility; • Strong connection with audiences and communities; • Ability to experiment and innovate at low cost.	• Limited eligibility for major public funding schemes; • Lack of formal structure for financial management; • Difficulty meeting co-funding or reporting requirements.

Strategic Advice

- **Start small and local.** Look for municipal or regional artist grants, mobility schemes, and residencies focused on sustainability or social impact.
- **Use crowdfunding** to raise seed funds and demonstrate public interest. Platforms like Goteo or Ulule can double as audience-building tools.

- **Collaborate with host organizations.** Partner with NGOs, cultural centers, or festivals that can act as fiscal sponsors — allowing you to access funds indirectly.
- **Showcase sustainability in your practice.** Funders increasingly value environmental awareness, fair work conditions, and community engagement.
- **Leverage the CreaSus Self-Assessment Tool** to document your sustainability readiness; this can strengthen your credibility when partnering or applying for funds.

SMEs & Creative Start-ups

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups represent the innovative engine of the cultural and creative sectors. They combine artistic creativity with entrepreneurship, developing sustainable products, technologies, and services. Many are exploring eco-design, circular economy practices, or digital sustainability — areas that align strongly with EU funding priorities.

STRENGTHS	TYPICAL BARRIERS
• Entrepreneurial mindset and capacity for innovation; • Potential to scale and attract investment; • Alignment with EU sustainability and green transition agendas.	• Limited access to patient capital or risk-tolerant investors; • Complexity of EU application procedures; • Need for strong documentation and measurable impact indicators.

Strategic Advice

- **Explore innovation-driven programmes.** Funds like Horizon Europe, LIFE, or national green-transition schemes often support sustainable production, materials research, and digital transformation.
- **Consider blended finance.** Combine public grants with private investment or corporate sponsorships to reduce risk and increase flexibility.
- **Engage with accelerators or incubators.** Many provide mentoring, funding readiness training, and networking opportunities.
- **Quantify your impact.** Use sustainability metrics or indicators (aligned with CreaSus) to show how your innovation contributes to environmental and social goals.

- **Build partnerships early.** EU and national calls increasingly value collaboration — with universities, NGOs, and other SMEs — as proof of scalability and innovation potential.

Non-profits, Associations & Cooperatives

Non-profit organizations, associations, and cooperatives form the social backbone of the creative ecosystem. They are often driven by values of inclusion, participation, and cultural sustainability. Their mission orientation makes them ideal candidates for community-based or social innovation funds — but financial sustainability and administrative requirements can be challenging.

STRENGTHS	TYPICAL BARRIERS
• Strong social mission and community trust; • Experience in delivering educational and participatory projects; • Natural alignment with social sustainability and cultural inclusion goals.	• Limited cash flow and co-funding capacity; • Reliance on short-term project grants; • Administrative burden and reporting demands from multiple funders.

Strategic Advice

- **Target mission-aligned funds.** Programmes like Creative Europe, Erasmus+, or Interreg offer opportunities for cooperation and capacity building with sustainability dimensions.
- **Diversify funding sources.** Combine grants with membership fees, sponsorships, or small-scale crowdfunding to stabilize income.
- **Invest in project management skills.** Strong planning, budgeting, and reporting increase funder confidence and future eligibility.
- **Engage with local authorities.** Partnerships with municipalities or regional governments can unlock co-funding or in-kind support.
- **Use the CreaSus Transformation Actions tool** to identify tested sustainability practices that strengthen your case for funding and enhance long-term impact.

Although each pathway represents a different journey, they all share a common principle "**funding success begins with clarity and readiness"**. Whether you are an independent artist or an established creative enterprise, take the time to understand your unique

value, document your sustainability efforts, and align your projects with funders' priorities.

Remember that growth is a specific procedure. Many CCSIs start with local initiatives, build partnerships through national or EU cooperation projects, and gradually attract private or impact investors. The more strategically you connect these steps, the stronger and more sustainable your organization becomes.

4.5 Building a Funding Strategy

Securing funding should not be a matter of luck. In contrary, it is a process of planning, positioning, and persistence. A sustainable funding strategy allows your organization to grow gradually, remain resilient through uncertainty, and align its resources with long-term creative and social goals. Instead of reacting to each new call for proposals, a strategy helps you **proactively shape your path**, combining different sources of support and building relationships that last beyond a single project.

Diversify Your Funding Mix

A strong strategy combines **different types of resources** (public, private, community-based, and in-kind)

- **Public funds** (EU, national, regional) offer structure and credibility;
- **Private partnerships** bring flexibility and innovation;
- **Crowdfunding** connects you directly with your audience;
- **In-kind contributions**, such as venues, materials, or expert time, demonstrate local commitment and can serve as co-funding.

This will help you reduce dependence on any single source and create stability. Many successful CCSIs use smaller grants to build track records, then leverage that experience to access larger or more competitive opportunities later.

Plan Ahead with a Funding Calendar

Timing is critical. Most funding programmes have regular cycles, annual or multiannual, with calls announced months in advance. Creating a **funding calendar** helps you anticipate opportunities instead of rushing to meet deadlines.

- Track the opening and closing dates of relevant programmes;

- Note reporting periods and eligibility windows;
- Allocate time for proposal writing and partner coordination;
- Include internal milestones such as board approvals or audits.

This simple tool turns uncertainty into structure and ensures that funding preparation becomes a **continuous activity**, not a last-minute effort.

Set Realistic Goals for Growth

Every organization's funding journey is different. Rather than trying to secure large-scale support immediately, start where you are strongest. Focus first on manageable opportunities that build your experience and visibility. Set **achievable annual goals**, such as:

- Submitting one high-quality application per year;
- Establishing a partnership with a complementary organization;
- Diversifying income streams by adding one new type of funding.

Small, consistent steps build credibility and confidence. Over time, your organization will evolve from being grant-dependent to being strategically financed, able to attract, manage, and sustain funding across multiple channels.

Leverage the CreaSus Tools

The CreaSus platform offers practical support for building and maintaining your funding strategy.

- The **Self-Assessment Tool** helps you evaluate your sustainability readiness and identify areas to strengthen before applying.
- The **Transformation Actions** library provides tested good practices and examples you can adapt to your own context.
- The **Funding Toolkit** (this document) guides you in matching your profile and sustainability goals with suitable opportunities.
- The **Sustainable Business Models** provide practical guidance on how to design and adapt your organisation's business model to be economically viable while integrating environmental and social sustainability principles.

Together, these tools allow you to **track your progress** over time, document improvements, and demonstrate your organization's commitment to sustainability.

5__TEMPLATES & RESOURCES

5. Templates & Resources

Funding success depends not only on good ideas but also on careful preparation and organization. This section provides guidance to help you move from concept to a solid proposal. Because funding programmes vary widely in structure and terminology, it would be impossible — and unrealistic — to provide a single proposal template suitable for all cases.

Instead, the following pages outline the **most common elements you will find in nearly every funding application**. Understanding these sections will help you adapt easily to different formats, whether you are applying for a local cultural grant, a European cooperation project, or private sponsorship.

Even if you are drafting a proposal from scratch, you should make sure your document includes the components described below. They represent the key information every funder expects: what your project aims to achieve, how it contributes to sustainability, and how you will manage and measure its impact.

5.1 Proposal Template

While every funding programme provides its own format and terminology, most proposals — regardless of whether they come from a public agency, a private foundation, or a crowdfunding campaign — follow a similar logic. They all aim to understand the same three things:

What you want to achieve, how you plan to do it, and why it matters.

SECTION	GUIDING NOTES
1. Project Title & Summary	Provide a clear, concise title and a short overview (max 150 words) summarizing your project's objectives and expected impact.
2. Context & Rationale	What sustainability challenge are you addressing? How does it relate to your community, audience, or sector? Reference data, trends, or existing initiatives.
3. Objectives & Expected Results	List 2–3 specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives. Indicate environmental, social, or governance (ESG) impacts.
4. Activities & Methodology	Describe the main activities and how they will lead to results. Include milestones, partners involved, and any co-creation or participatory elements.

5. Target Groups & Beneficiaries	Who benefits from your project (directly and indirectly)? Mention stakeholders, audiences, and local communities.
6. Innovation & Sustainability Dimension	Explain how your project contributes to sustainability — for example, by reducing waste, promoting inclusion, or supporting circular economy models.
7. Expected Outputs	What tangible deliverables will result (e.g., a toolkit, exhibition, training programme, publication)?
8. Budget Summary & Co-Funding	Indicate the total project cost, requested funding, and any other contributions (financial or in-kind). Ensure clarity and internal consistency.
9. Team & Partners	Present key members, their roles, and relevant experience. Highlight complementary skills and cross-sector collaboration.
10. Evaluation & Impact Assessment	How will you measure success? Define indicators (qualitative and quantitative) to track progress.
11. Communication & Dissemination	Outline how you will share results — through social media, events, publications, or networks.
12. Sustainability Beyond the Project	Explain how outcomes will continue or scale up after the funding period.

5.2 Budget Planning Tool

A clear and realistic budget is essential to convince funders of your project's credibility. This simple structure helps you plan income and expenditure while ensuring transparency and avoiding common mistakes (like double-counting or missing indirect costs).

BUDGET CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION / EXAMPLES
1. Personnel / Fees	Artists, designers, project managers, technical experts, trainers
2. Travel & Mobility	Transport, accommodation, subsistence for project-related travel
3. Materials & Equipment	Production materials, digital tools, rental of sustainable equipment
4. Subcontracting / External Services	Graphic design, communication, evaluation, or external experts
5. Communication & Dissemination	Website, social media, publications, events, outreach

6. Other Costs	Any other eligible costs directly related to activities
10. Total Project Cost	

Budgeting Tips:

- Check eligibility rules carefully — some programmes limit subcontracting or overheads.
- Always include co-funding or in-kind support if possible; it demonstrates commitment.
- Keep documentation for every expense (invoices, contracts, timesheets).
- Avoid **double funding** — ensure that no single cost item is financed by more than one source.

5.3 Checklist for Eligibility and Documentation

Before applying for funding, always make sure you meet the basic eligibility criteria and have all the required documents ready. This checklist will help you stay organized and avoid disqualification for technical reasons.

AREA	CHECKLIST QUESTIONS	STATUS
1. Legal Eligibility	Is your organization legally registered and eligible under the call?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Does your legal status (profit/non-profit) fit the programme requirements?	☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Financial Capacity	Do you have a dedicated bank account for the project?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Are your accounts or balance sheets up to date?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Can you provide co-funding or in-kind contributions if required?	☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Administrative Readiness	Is your organization familiar with proposal and reporting procedures?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Do you have internal approval to apply and sign contracts?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Have you identified a contact person for funder communication?	☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Project Documentation	Do you have a clear project plan with objectives, activities, and results?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Is your budget balanced and supported by quotations or estimates?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Have you gathered CVs, letters of support, or partnership confirmations?	☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Sustainability and Impact	Have you articulated the sustainability dimension of your project (environmental, social, or governance)?	☐ Yes ☐ No
	Did you use the CreaSus Self-Assessment Tool to demonstrate readiness?	☐ Yes ☐ No

A well-written proposal is more than an administrative requirement, but a way to tell your story and connect your creative vision with a broader social and environmental purpose. Regardless of the format or funder, clarity, coherence, and credibility always make the difference. Take time to adapt your language to the funder's priorities, demonstrate realistic planning, and communicate your sustainability impact with evidence.

5.4 Measuring and Communicating Sustainability Impact

Funders increasingly expect to fund projects that are able to demonstrate results. This does not aply only in terms of the delivered activities, but in terms of concrete sustainable outcomes. Measuring and communicating impact strengthens your credibility, supports future funding applications, and demonstrates your commitment to responsible and sustainable creative practice.

So, measuring the impact is essential. This does not require complex systems, but it does require clarity about what you aim to change and how you will demonstrate progress.

When planning your project or preparing a funding proposal, it is useful to distinguish between four levels of results:

LEVEL	WHAT IT SHOWS	EXAMPLE
Input	Resources used	€5,000 invested in sustainable materials
Output	What was/will be delivered	5 workshops implemented/will be implemented
Outcome	Short-term change	Participants adopt eco-design practices
Impact	Long-term difference	Reduced waste in local creative production

While inputs and outputs show the activities, funders will also focus on the outcomes and the impact as well to understand the change that you will create.

Simple Impact Planning Tool

You can use the table below to help you when drafting proposals or preparing reports and to understand the logic behind the impact you want to create:

OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITY	OUTPUT INDICATOR	OUTCOME INDICATOR	IMPACT INDICATOR
What do you want to change?	What will you do?	What will you produce?	What will change in the short term?	What longer-term effect will this create?

You should keep the indicators realistic and proportionate to your scale. Even if your project or initiative is small, you can always demonstrate meaningful change. You can achieve this through participants feedback, documented practice shifts, or strengthened the engagement of the community.

Communicating Your Results

Impact becomes valuable when the results are communicated clearly. When pittching or reporting to funders you should:

- Combine numbers with short explanations.
- Use simple visuals or tables.
- Be transparent about both achievements and challenges.
- Show how your project contributes to environmental, social, or governance improvements.

Different funders or funding mechanisms emphasize in different aspects. For example, public programmes often require structured indicators, while private funders may value more the visible social or environmental benefits. Adapt your communication style accordingly regarding the case.

Linking Impact to CreaSus Tools

The CreaSus project provides valuable support for impact measurement. The **Self-Assessment Tool** helps you establish a sustainability baseline, documenting where your organization currently stands across environmental, social, and governance dimensions. The **Transformation Actions Tool** offers tested sustainability practices that can inform your objectives and indicators, the **Sustainable Business Models** provide practical guidance on how to design and adapt your organisation's business model, and finally the present **Funding Toolkit** helps you connect these sustainability efforts with appropriate financial mechanisms.

6__NEXT STEPS

6. Next Steps: From Learning to Action

This Toolkit has walked you through the key stages of accessing and managing sustainability funding within the cultural and creative sectors. You have explored how the funding landscape is structured — from European to national and private mechanisms — and how to identify which pathways best fit your organization's profile and ambitions. You have learned how to interpret eligibility criteria, assess readiness, and use decision-making tools such as the Funding Matrix and Flowchart to navigate opportunities with clarity.

You have also discovered how to translate ideas into actionable proposals, build credible budgets, and ensure compliance through careful preparation and documentation. The templates and checklists provided offer a foundation you can adapt to any funding programme, while the case studies and examples illustrate how diverse creative actors are already contributing to sustainability across Europe.

Taken together, these resources are designed to help you move **from knowledge to implementation**. Use the **CreaSus Self-Assessment Tool** to track your progress, explore the **Transformation Actions** to enrich your ideas, the **Sustainable Business Models** to review and adapt your business plan, and return to the **Funding Toolkit** whenever you begin a new project cycle.

Sustainability funding is a continuous process of learning, adaptation, and collaboration, not a one-time achievement. With the knowledge gained from this Toolkit and the support of the wider CreaSus community, you are now ready to take the next steps toward a more resilient, responsible, and inspired creative future.

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