EUROPEAN CULTURAL
AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
INNOVATION POLICY PLATFORM

***EKIP* POLICY LAB**

Financing Europe's most valuable asset: New funding models for creativity and innovation

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM POLICY LAB #12

KEY CONTRIBUTORS:

RAGNAR SIIL, *CREATIVITY LAB*
DR KRISTIINA URB, *CREATIVITY LAB*
ISABELLE DE VOLDERE, *IDEA CONSULT*
EGLĖ VALINTĖLYTĖ, *IDEA CONSULT*

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Key Recommendations

Europe needs funding and investment that reflect how creative innovation happens. This report proposes eight changes to enable Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) to contribute fully to open innovation ecosystems.

1. **Develop flexible financing that matches how creative innovation works.** Pilot a European Creative Investment Framework that supports exploration, allows plans to adapt and shares risk appropriately.
2. **Use financing sandboxes to test new contracts, ownership and funding rules.** Test practical alternatives and bring successful approaches into regular funding programmes.
3. **Connect funding programmes through coordinated decisions and follow-on routes.** Make it easier to combine support and continue promising work when individual grants end.
4. **Build financial and innovation capability among creative actors, funders, investors and evaluators.** Help them learn from real financing decisions and better understand each other's work.
5. **Resource intermediaries to organise joint innovation and support the creative swarm.** Fund the coordination that enables creative actors to combine their expertise and work with partners across sectors.
6. **Expand shared access to technology and test digital tools that improve financing.** Make essential resources more accessible and use digital tools where they demonstrably improve access, payments or administration.
7. **Make broader value, fair participation and benefit-sharing part of financing decisions.** Recognise economic, cultural, social and environmental contributions, pay people fairly and agree how results and ownership are shared.
8. **Establish long-term financing that preserves capacity and supports wider adoption.** Sustain useful knowledge, relationships and shared resources beyond individual projects and help successful innovations reach users.

Organised through the ekip Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks, these recommendations combine changes to existing programmes with new financing approaches. Public cultural funding remains essential. The aim is to enable creative actors to shape innovation, benefit fairly from its results and sustain their capacity to work together.

1 Introduction

Europe does not lack creativity. What it lacks is a financing system built for the way creative innovation actually happens. This report sets out how European financing policy can move from fragmented, short-term project support towards connected funding and investment that sustain **open innovation ecosystems**[1] and meet changing needs across the innovation process.

Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) create jobs, economic value and cultural experiences. They also help other sectors innovate by bringing **creative practice, design and new ways of understanding people** into the development of technologies, services and solutions. Their contribution begins with identifying challenges and imagining possibilities, well before a product reaches the market. Financing should enable CCIs to shape and benefit from innovation from the outset.

The central problem is a **mismatch between how creative innovation develops and how it is financed.** Creative innovation frequently relies on intangible assets, experimentation, iterative development, interdisciplinary collaboration and networks. Many existing funding and investment mechanisms favour predefined outcomes, technological innovation, conventional forms of scalability and predictable financial returns. Support also remains fragmented across cultural policy, innovation policy, regional development and private investment. Promising work can lose momentum when one grant ends, a partnership changes or the next financing instrument requires a different kind of applicant or outcome.

The way creative actors organise is equally important. CCIs can be described as a **swarm of small players**[2], with individuals, micro-enterprises, studios and other organisations combining their capabilities around a shared challenge. Together, they can undertake innovation that would be beyond their individual reach, including collaboration with research teams and deep-tech companies. Financing needs to support this **collective capacity and the connections** that sustain it as participants and opportunities change.

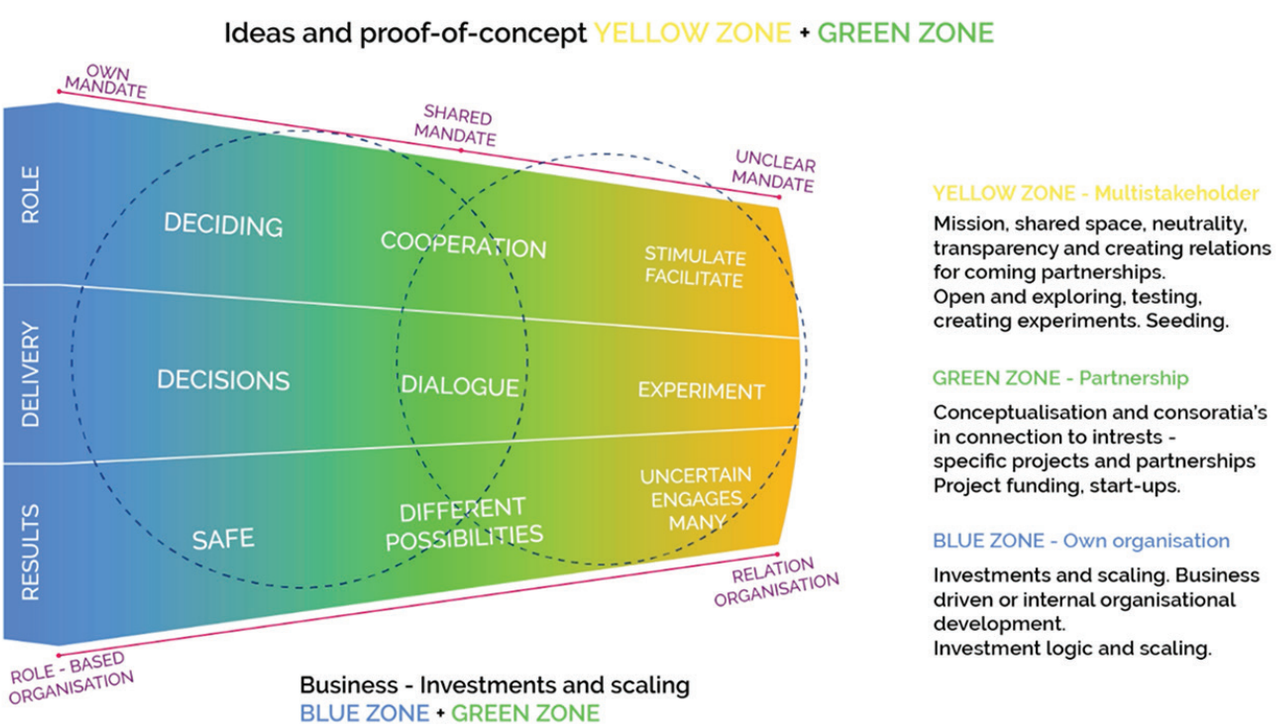
The report uses the *ekip* **Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks**[3] as its organising framework. An open innovation ecosystem enables creative actors, researchers, businesses, public authorities and communities to share knowledge, capabilities and resources across organisational and sector boundaries, jointly shaping innovation and benefiting from its results. Investment & Funding is the focus of this report, but its effectiveness depends on the other six blocks. Regulation & Governance shapes participation and collaboration. Skills & Competences enable creative actors and financiers to understand each other and work together. Infrastructures & Networks provide shared resources and connections, while Techniques & Technologies support experimentation and development. The Social Dimension addresses participation and the distribution of benefits. Sustainable Competitiveness concerns the capacity to create lasting value. The policy recommendations address these interdependencies.

[1] https://ekipengine.eu/core-concepts/
[2] https://ekipengine.eu/the-challenge-isnt-creativity-but-connectivity/
[3] https://ekipengine.eu/boosting-innovation-across-sectors-and-borders/

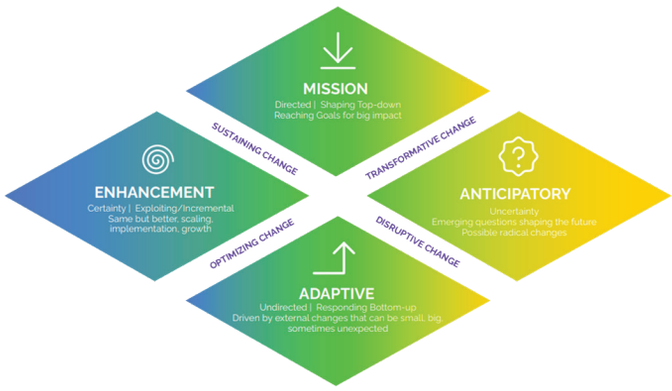


Within this framework, the **innovation portfolio approach** provides a way to organise joint ambition and investment. A portfolio connects activities and partners that contribute to a shared transformation, with room to learn, change direction and develop several complementary innovations. ekip's portfolio-scoping tools help partners define that shared direction. Intermediaries need resources to bring participants together, coordinate the work and connect it to suitable finance. A complementary mix of financing instruments should serve this wider innovation portfolio.

Two further *ekip* tools help match support to the work involved. The **Zone Model** distinguishes shared exploration in the yellow zone, negotiated collaboration between organisations in the green zone and development under an organisation's own mandate in the blue zone. These call for seed funding, project funding and investment respectively, with continuity between them. They should not be treated as a fixed sequence that every initiative must follow.



The **OPSI Model,** adapted from the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, distinguishes enhancement-oriented, adaptive, mission-oriented and anticipatory innovation. These purposes require different expectations about uncertainty, timescales and results.



The aim is to **finance open innovation by, for and with CCIs,** both within creative sectors and across industries. This includes funding the work that makes collaboration possible, such as building trust, sharing knowledge and maintaining access to expertise and infrastructure. Funding should enable CCIs to help define shared challenges and decisions, with opportunities for new partners to join and fair arrangements for sharing the value created. Success should be assessed through the economic, cultural, social and environmental value created, including the wider adoption of innovations and the capacity for continued collaboration.

Public cultural funding remains essential, including for cultural diversity and production in small language markets. Commercially viable activities also need suitable routes to investment. These needs can coexist within an initiative or portfolio. The appropriate **financing mix** should reflect the work, its risks and the value it creates, with approaches adapted to different regional conditions and capacities. Financing arrangements should also make clear who carries potential losses, when repayment is expected and how risks are shared between creative actors, public funders and private investors.

Ultimately, the report asks a broader question than how to provide more funding to CCIs. **How can Europe build the financing conditions in which creativity functions as an integral part of its innovation capacity?** The report first defines the policy area and examines its development, emerging trends, challenges and opportunities. It then sets out the policy vision and stakeholder needs and maps existing European, national and regional measures and initiatives. Based on this analysis, it identifies the key challenges that need to be addressed and proposes eight policy recommendations, organised through seven Innovation Building Blocks.

The recommendations were developed through the *ekip* **Policy Lab methodology**, combining prior scoping and research with stakeholder co-creation. The policy problem was first scoped through desk research, stakeholder input and contributions from *ekip* partners, after which the Policy Lab brought stakeholders together to map challenges and collaboratively develop possible policy responses. The Policy Lab took place online on 19 May 2026, followed by two Community Review sessions that tested and refined the emerging recommendations: the first in Brussels on 9 June 2026 and the second in Athens on 18 June 2026. This iterative process allowed the recommendations to incorporate perspectives from cultural and creative actors alongside policymakers, researchers, intermediaries, innovation organisations, investors and financial-sector stakeholders.

These recommendations are primarily addressed to organisations that design, fund, manage or evaluate support for cultural and creative innovation at European, national, regional and local levels. They include public authorities, funding agencies, programme managers, financial institutions, investors, foundations and intermediaries. The report is also relevant to creative actors and partners from other sectors seeking to develop joint innovation and secure suitable financing.

We thank everyone who contributed to the Policy Lab and Community Reviews. Our thanks also go to the *ekip* partners and validators, and hosts of the Community Reviews and everyone who contributed evidence, examples and critical perspectives through the *ekip* Knowledge Bank and community.

2 Policy problem – the financing challenge

This chapter defines the scope of the financing challenge, traces how support for culture and creativity has developed, and examines emerging trends. It then identifies the main challenges and opportunities for financing innovation by, for and with CCIs in open innovation ecosystems.

2.1 DEFINITION AND SCOPE

This policy area concerns the **funding and investment conditions that enable innovation by, for and with CCIs in open innovation ecosystems.** It covers experimentation, collaborative development, the wider adoption of innovations and the capacity to sustain this work over time.

The scope includes both **innovation within CCIs and innovation with CCIs.** Within creative sectors, this includes new artistic forms, cultural practices, relationships with audiences and communities, organisational models, products, services and technologies. Cultural innovation can have value in its own right, whether or not it leads to commercial returns or applications in other sectors. Across sectors, it enables creative actors to develop joint responses to challenges with partners from research, industry, government and civil society. In keeping with *ekip*'s open innovation approach, CCIs participate from the outset, helping to identify problems, imagine possibilities, test solutions and put them into practice. They both shape and benefit from the results.

Cultural and innovation policy serve different but potentially complementary purposes. One useful distinction is that cultural policy often focuses on **who** is supported and the cultural value of their work, while innovation policy focuses on **what** is developed and its potential for wider application. Cultural production can generate new tools, methods or solutions that have uses beyond the original production. Connecting the two funding approaches creates an opportunity to develop these results further through innovation support, while preserving the distinct purpose of cultural funding.

New funding models involve **adapting existing instruments and changing how funding is allocated, combined and governed.** In this report, finance is the broad term for the resources and arrangements that support an activity. Funding generally refers to grants and other support without an expected financial return. Loans and investment involve repayment or an expected financial return, under agreed conditions. The name Investment & Funding is retained for the ekip building block, which covers these different arrangements. They concern finance for individual activities and organisations, alongside the shared resources and coordination that enable changing groups of partners to innovate together. Their purpose is to connect suitable sources of finance, assess and share risks appropriately, and sustain work from experimentation through to wider use and lasting value.

The distinction between an **innovation portfolio and a mix of financial instruments** matters here. An innovation portfolio connects activities and partners around a shared direction, allowing them to learn together and adapt their work. Grants, loans, guarantees, equity and other instruments can finance different parts of that work. Combining instruments alone does not create a portfolio if the activities and partners remain disconnected.

The focus is on financing innovation and the conditions that enable it, rather than the funding of culture in its entirety. Public cultural support retains its distinct purposes. Using the *ekip* Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks, the analysis examines how Investment & Funding interacts with the skills, governance, infrastructure, technology and relationships needed for open innovation.

2.2 BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

Public support for culture in Europe has deep historical roots, traditionally grounded in the notion of culture as a public good essential to identity, social cohesion, and democratic life. For much of the twentieth century, funding models were dominated by state subsidies, patronage systems, and institutional support for major cultural organisations such as museums, theatres, and orchestras. These approaches primarily supported preservation, access and artistic excellence, without necessarily identifying innovation as a separate policy objective.

From the late twentieth century onwards, policymakers increasingly recognised the economic contribution of CCIs, including their role in employment, entrepreneurship and regional development. The growing use of the term creative industries in the 1990s and early 2000s helped bring this contribution into policy discussions. This shift led to the integration of creative sectors into broader innovation and competitiveness agendas at both national and European levels.

At EU level, successive programmes have progressively expanded the scope of support. Early initiatives focused primarily on cultural cooperation and heritage, while later frameworks incorporated digitalisation, market development, and cross-sectoral innovation. The establishment of dedicated instruments marked an important step towards recognising the structural financing needs of creative enterprises. These programmes also promoted transnational collaboration and capacity building, reflecting the cross-border nature of cultural markets.

Despite these advances, much of the funding available for new creative and collaborative initiatives remains tied to short-term projects. The global financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures exposed the vulnerability of cultural funding systems and intensified the search for alternative sources of finance. At the same time, digital transformation disrupted traditional value chains, creating both new opportunities and new financing challenges for creative producers.

In response, the past decade has seen experimentation with financing models that complement public grants. Microloans and revenue-linked finance provide money with different repayment conditions. Guarantees share lenders' risks and can make lending possible where it would otherwise be unavailable. Public and private partners can combine these instruments under agreed funding and governance arrangements. Impact investment can use loans, equity or other structures to pursue social, cultural or environmental benefits alongside financial returns. Many initiatives also seek to improve financial knowledge among creative actors and understanding of creative business models among financiers.

Recent research and European policy increasingly recognise culture and creativity as contributors to innovation and wider societal change. The OECD's The Culture Fix (2022) highlights their contribution across the economy and calls for stronger connections with innovation, environmental and social policies. The European Commission's Culture Compass for Europe (2025) reinforces this direction by linking culture to competitiveness, innovation, resilience and the green transition. These developments strengthen the case for financing that supports experimentation, collaboration and lasting capacity alongside individual projects.

European funding for culture and creativity now combines several approaches, with support for cultural purposes alongside investment in business development and innovation addressing wider societal challenges. Initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus illustrate growing recognition of the role of culture, creativity, and interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing Europe's green and social transitions. At the same time, research and innovation funding programmes such as Horizon Europe have created important opportunities for experimentation and cross-sector collaboration involving CCIs. A significant milestone was the designation of EIT Culture & Creativity as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology's ninth Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC). By connecting education, research and business through innovation projects, entrepreneurial education and business support, it gave culture and creativity a dedicated place within the EIT innovation ecosystem. This marked a further recognition of the sector's economic and innovation potential.

However, these opportunities do not yet form connected funding pathways for open innovation ecosystems. Gaps remain in financing shared exploration, sustaining collaboration between projects and supporting the wider adoption of successful innovations.

2.3 TRENDS

The trends below draw on ekip's social media listening[4], which analyses online content from a selected community of European creatives, early adopters and users engaged with EU policy. The wider observation community includes over 10,000 profiles across different creative sectors and European regions. Automated analysis of text and images is combined with human review to identify emerging themes. This provides insight into developing interests and discussions, rather than a representative survey of the sector.

The analysis identifies interest in a wider range of financing approaches, combining public funding, private investment, income from digital activity and community support. These approaches vary in maturity and reach. The following trends highlight emerging practices and discussions relevant to innovation by, for and with CCIs.

Combining funding sources. Financing arrangements bring together EU, national, regional and local resources with private investment, philanthropy and community contributions. Combining these resources can enable risk-sharing and support activities that fall between individual programmes. However, several funding sources do not automatically form a connected innovation portfolio. Their contribution depends on how they support related activities and collaboration between partners.

Growing attention to mutual financial and innovation literacy. Financing debates increasingly concern knowledge gaps on both sides. Creative actors may need help understanding financial instruments and preparing for investment, while financiers and programme managers may lack familiarity with creative business models, intangible assets and collaborative innovation. This brings greater attention to advice, mentoring and intermediaries that connect creative and financial expertise.

Greater attention to impact and value. Financing debates increasingly consider wider economic, cultural, social and environmental benefits alongside financial returns. Economic benefits, such as employment, local spending and stronger supply chains, are different from the returns received by a lender or investor. An initiative can generate these benefits without earning enough income to repay finance or reward investors. However, assessing broader impact is different from making funding conditional on predefined results. The distinction matters particularly for anticipatory innovation, where learning and exploring possibilities may be more meaningful than delivering a solution specified in advance. The different purposes identified by the OPSI Model help explain why a single approach to assessment may not suit every activity.

Financial insecurity and the capacity to innovate. Unstable incomes and the gap between the value generated by creative work and the income received by creators continue to shape financing debates. Digital change, including artificial intelligence, also raises questions about future income models and remuneration. Both income insecurity and the timing of payments affect who can participate in innovation. An organisation may have funding confirmed but lack the working capital needed to pay people and suppliers before reimbursement arrives. Delayed payments and upfront co-financing requirements can therefore exclude capable partners, even when their activities are fully funded on paper.

Experimentation with digital income and financing models. Digital tools are enabling experimentation with direct audience support, community funding, automated royalties and new ways of managing payments and rights. Some approaches test whether blockchain or smart contracts can improve transparency and income distribution. Income generation and innovation finance nevertheless serve different purposes. A new way to receive payment for creative work does not automatically provide resources for experimentation or shared infrastructure. These approaches remain uneven in their development

[4] https://ekipengine.eu/tools-methods/social-media-listening-analysis-of-ekips-policy-areas

and use. Their contribution depends on whether they provide reliable income or finance, protect creators' interests and avoid introducing additional costs or dependencies.

Peer learning and creator-led approaches. Social listening also identifies discussion of peer learning, digital tools and online communities through which creators exchange financial knowledge and explore income options. These practices can strengthen individual capability and connections between peers. They do not, on their own, provide the resources needed for sustained joint innovation across industries.

2.4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The financing challenge for innovation in and with CCIs is not primarily a shortage of individual funding instruments, but a **structural mismatch between existing financing systems and the characteristics of CCI innovation.** Across previous *ekip* Policy Areas, recurring challenges include difficulties in financing experimentation, recognising the value created by CCIs and sustaining collaboration. These findings show how funding conditions interact with the other Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks. The challenges concern both access to suitable finance and the capacity of creative actors to participate in open innovation ecosystems.

Matching finance to different forms of innovation. Funding requirements can be difficult to meet when partners are still exploring a challenge, testing possibilities or agreeing how to work together. The Zone Model helps distinguish these needs. Yellow-zone exploration may begin before there is a defined project, green-zone collaboration requires resources for joint work and coordination, and blue-zone development needs finance suited to an organisation's activities and prospects. Recognising these differences creates opportunities to match funding to the work involved and connect instruments without requiring every initiative to follow a fixed sequence.

Enabling smaller actors to contribute to joint innovation. Application procedures, co-financing requirements and delayed payments can exclude freelancers, micro-enterprises and smaller cultural organisations with valuable expertise. The problem is particularly significant when participation depends on unpaid preparatory work or the capacity to manage a large application. Smaller grants, innovation vouchers and intermediary support can provide entry points into wider innovation portfolios. Their potential extends beyond funding individual projects to enabling the creative swarm to undertake ambitious work with partners across industries.

Closing knowledge gaps on both sides. Creative actors may lack experience in selecting financial instruments, preparing investment proposals or navigating funding programmes. Financiers and evaluators may have limited understanding of creative business models, intangible assets and collaborative innovation. These gaps can lead to unsuitable applications, overlooked opportunities and poorly informed assessments of risk. Mutual financial and innovation literacy, supported by intermediaries, offers a basis for better decisions and stronger working relationships.

Recognising value and the role of creative partners. Assessment focused on revenue, patents or company growth can overlook cultural, social and environmental benefits, as well as shared knowledge and new practices. CCIs may also be brought into projects mainly to communicate results, limiting their contribution to defining challenges and developing solutions. Broader assessment can make these contributions visible and help identify suitable support. It does not make every activity commercially investable. Public and philanthropic funding remain important where the value created cannot generate sufficient financial returns.

Connecting programmes around shared work. Innovation involving CCIs crosses boundaries between culture, research, industry and regional development, while funding responsibilities remain divided across programmes and levels of government. Partners may need to reconcile different eligibility rules, schedules and reporting requirements within the same portfolio. Better connections between programmes offer opportunities to sustain shared work as individual projects begin and end. Intermediaries can help maintain that continuity, but their coordinating role also requires resources.

Accessing the tools and infrastructure needed for change. Digital and green innovation requires access to technology, facilities and expertise that smaller actors may struggle to afford. Differences between organisations and regions affect who can experiment and help shape new approaches. Shared infrastructure and cross-sector partnerships can widen access and combine creative, technical and research capabilities. Their usefulness depends on continuing support, relevant skills and workable access arrangements, as well as the initial investment.

Sustaining collaboration beyond individual projects. Living Labs, innovation networks and cross-sector partnerships build relationships and knowledge that remain valuable after a project ends. When funding stops, this capacity can disperse before further work begins. Continuity involves developing promising innovations while keeping shared resources available for new exploration and collaboration. An innovation portfolio provides a way to connect these activities over time, allowing participants to change while knowledge and relationships are retained and developed.

3 Policy vision

This chapter sets out the changes the report aims to achieve and the needs of those involved in financing and delivering creative innovation. It brings together shared objectives with the different perspectives of creative actors, funders, investors, intermediaries and cross-sector partners.

3.1 FINANCING CREATIVITY AS A STRATEGIC COMPONENT OF INNOVATION

The policy vision is a European financing environment in which **creativity is recognised and financed as a strategic component of innovation,** and cultural and creative actors participate as equal partners in open innovation ecosystems. Financing should strengthen innovation within CCIs and enable creative knowledge, practices and capabilities to contribute to joint innovation across sectors.

Achieving this vision requires connected funding and investment that support **innovation portfolios and the ecosystems** around them. European, national, regional and local resources should work alongside private investment and other sources of finance to meet different needs. These include shared exploration, collaborative projects and development within organisations, with continuity as activities and partnerships evolve.

Policy action should pursue five interconnected objectives:

1. **Align financing instruments with the realities of CCI innovation.** Funding and investment should accommodate experimentation, uncertainty, intangible assets and interdisciplinary collaboration. Artistic and creative practices can themselves involve research and experimentation, including during production. Support should allow time for this work and for relationships to develop, including between funders and recipients. Clear responsibilities, regular dialogue and agreed review points should combine accountability with room to adapt. Expectations about outcomes, timescales and risk should reflect the purpose of the work, drawing on the Zone Model and OPSI Model.
2. **Improve access to suitable and diversified finance.** SMEs, micro-enterprises, freelancers, independent creators and smaller cultural organisations should be able to access finance suited to their work and participate in wider innovation portfolios. This means supporting both individual capabilities and the collective capacity of the creative swarm, without expecting every actor to follow the same financing or growth model.
3. **Build financial and innovation capability among all stakeholders.** Creative actors need the knowledge to make informed financing decisions and prepare for investment where appropriate. Investors, funders, programme designers and evaluators need a stronger understanding of creative business models, intangible assets, collaborative innovation and the value these generate.
4. **Recognise and finance multiple forms of value and impact.** Funding decisions should recognise economic and technological results alongside cultural, social, environmental and civic value. Assessment should combine quantitative evidence with qualitative judgement, capturing learning and longer-term benefits as well as immediate outputs. Small initiatives can make significant contributions to particular communities, places or practices without growing substantially in size. Public support and commercial investment have complementary roles, according to the activity and the value it creates.
5. **Strengthen connectivity and continuity across the financing ecosystem**. Cultural, innovation and regional development policies should connect more effectively with one another and with private investment. Financing should sustain related activities within innovation portfolios and the intermediaries, relationships and shared resources that connect them. Promising work and collective capacity should be able to continue beyond individual project funding.

Success would mean that a wider diversity of actors can contribute to innovation, suitable finance is available as needs change, and the value created is recognised and sustained. Together, these objectives support the wider ambition of the ekip Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks, enabling CCIs to contribute to European competitiveness, cultural diversity, sustainability, social cohesion and democratic resilience.

3.2 STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

Previous *ekip* Policy Labs and stakeholder discussions identify a need for financing that is accessible, flexible and sustained over time. What this means in practice differs according to each actor's role, resources and contribution to open innovation.

Creative actors need accessible and continuous financing pathways. Freelancers, micro-enterprises, SMEs and cultural organisations need manageable application requirements, clear information and advice on suitable instruments. Financing must accommodate different ambitions and ways of working, including participation in changing creative teams. Access should not depend on every actor becoming investment-ready for the same type of finance. Creative actors also need autonomy, fair remuneration and a fair share of the value they create. These needs apply to collaborative innovation and to emerging digital income models. Ownership of creative work, control over its use and the ability to move between digital services matter when financing arrangements involve proprietary platforms or new ways of managing rights and payments.

Public funders, innovation agencies and evaluators need the mandate, knowledge and practical means to support creative innovation. Programme managers may recognise the value of a proposal but lack the authority to fund exploratory work, accept uncertain outcomes or combine support from different instruments. Evaluators may be required to use standard criteria that leave little room for unfamiliar business models or cultural and social benefits. Limited sector expertise and pressure to justify spending through predictable results can reinforce these constraints. Decisionmakers therefore need clear programme objectives, assessment methods suited to different forms of innovation and access to relevant expertise. They also need workable rules for coordinating support across programmes and explaining why a funding decision is justified, including when an experiment does not deliver the expected result.

Private investors and financial institutions need opportunities they can assess and finance within their investment or lending mandates. Individual decisionmakers must justify expected returns, risks and costs to investment committees, credit teams or clients. Limited knowledge of creative business models, intangible assets and comparable ventures can make this difficult. Small investments and collaborations involving several independent actors may also carry high assessment and contracting costs relative to the amounts involved. Better evidence, specialist advice and credible intermediaries can help make opportunities easier to assess. Where appropriate, shared assessment services, pooled investments and public risk-sharing can make financing feasible. Wider cultural or social benefits may matter to an investor but cannot substitute for financial returns where the mandate requires them.

Intermediaries need recognition and reliable resources to connect and coordinate partners. Cultural hubs, accelerators, Living Labs and other intermediary organisations support knowledge exchange, partnership development and access to finance. Their role extends to helping partners define the scope of innovation portfolios, agree a shared direction and sustain collaboration across sectors. They need the capacity to work across creative, financial, research and public-sector communities, including between funded projects. Their practical experience should also inform local, regional and national policies, particularly where these address social and economic challenges through cross-sector innovation.

Cities and regions need financing that responds to local conditions. Differences in infrastructure, expertise and access to capital affect the opportunities available to local actors. National and regional instruments can support initiatives that struggle to access larger European programmes, while local

partnerships and community finance can draw on local knowledge and participation. Less-resourced places also need access to wider networks and expertise so that investment does not remain concentrated in established innovation centres.

Cross-sector partners need financing arrangements that support joint work and recognise creative expertise. Partners from research, industry, public services and civil society need time and resources to explore challenges with CCIs, build relationships and develop solutions together. Clear agreements on roles, remuneration, ownership and the sharing of results help make this collaboration workable. Creative actors need to participate in shaping the work from the outset, with their contribution reflected in both decisions and budgets.

4 Policy and project mapping

This chapter focuses on EU-level policies, funding instruments and initiatives that support innovation within CCIs and collaboration with other sectors. It also includes selected national and regional examples to illustrate complementary approaches. The mapping is selective rather than a comprehensive overview of funding available across Europe.

4.1 CURRENT POLICY MEASURES, INITIATIVES AND NETWORKS

The European policy framework increasingly recognises Cultural and Creative Industries not only as carriers of cultural values and diversity, but also as contributors to **innovation, competitiveness and resilience.** Since 2021, the CCI ecosystem has been identified as one of the EU's 14 industrial ecosystems, while the 2022 Council Conclusions on Building a European Strategy for the Cultural and Creative Industries Ecosystem explicitly recognise the role of CCIs in prosperity, wellbeing and innovation. This represents an important shift in positioning: CCIs are increasingly understood not only as beneficiaries of cultural support, but as contributors to Europe's productive and innovation capacity.

The **2025 Culture Compass for Europe** further strengthens this policy direction by positioning culture and cultural heritage as contributors to a more competitive, resilient and cohesive Europe and explicitly recognising CCIs as drivers of economic growth, employment, innovation and competitiveness. The resulting policy trajectory therefore points towards stronger integration of CCIs into broader EU competitiveness and innovation agendas, with implications for how they should be positioned within future financing architectures.

However, policy recognition does not automatically give funders a clear mandate or suitable tools to support creativity-led innovation. The programmes mapped below offer different routes to support, but their eligibility rules, assessment methods and funding responsibilities do not necessarily connect. Addressing these gaps requires practical changes to programme rules, financing agreements and assessment procedures, alongside cooperation between institutions. The distinction between funding innovation in CCIs and with CCIs helps explain different purposes, although several programmes support both.

4.1.1 FUNDING INNOVATION IN CCIS ON EU LEVEL

Creative Europe remains the EU's principal programme dedicated specifically to the cultural and creative sectors. It supports cooperation projects, networks, mobility and cultural and creative work, providing opportunities for experimentation and cross-border collaboration. Its primary purpose is to support cultural activity and diversity, rather than requiring that every funded activity deliver an innovation. Preserving this cultural purpose is essential. At the same time, *ekip* highlights **innovation by production,** where new tools, methods or solutions emerge through making cultural work. Connecting these results to suitable innovation funding can enable their further development and wider use without changing the purpose of the original cultural support.

Access to finance for creative enterprises has been supported through the **Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility** (CCS GF), managed by the **European Investment Fund,** and through cultural and creative sector guarantees under **InvestEU.** These instruments share lending risks with participating financial intermediaries and aim to improve access to loans and lending terms. Their practical contribution needs to be assessed through the availability of participating lenders, application requirements, borrowing costs and the enterprises reached in different countries and subsectors. Guarantees can support business development and innovation where repayment is realistic, but do not remove the need for a credible source of repayment. They are therefore less suited to early experimentation and shared exploration without expected income. The EIF's implementation update

for September 2024 recorded €1.82 billion committed to final recipients through 9,458 transactions under the CCS Guarantee Facility, supporting 7,117 SMEs. These figures demonstrate the reach of guarantee-backed finance, although they do not show how much supported innovation or collaboration across sectors.

Horizon Europe provides another important source of research and innovation financing. Within Pillar 2, Cluster 2 – Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society – supports research and innovation related to cultural heritage and the cultural and creative sectors, including their green and digital transitions. CCI-related activities can also appear in other clusters, including Digital, Industry and Space and Climate, Energy and Mobility.

The designation of **EIT Culture & Creativity** in 2022 represents a more explicit attempt to connect CCIs with Europe's research and innovation ecosystem. It brings together innovation, business, research, culture and education and supports interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration across CCI subsectors. Importantly from a financing perspective, its approach seeks to move beyond individual project schemes towards the co-financing of longer-term partnerships aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of European CCIs.

4.1.2 FUNDING INNOVATION WITH CCIS ON EU LEVEL

While dedicated programmes increasingly support **innovation in CCIs,** the integration of cultural and creative actors into mainstream innovation **with other sectors** remains less systematic. The broader EU innovation financing architecture contains relatively few dedicated mechanisms for cross-sectoral innovation involving CCIs.

Several initiatives nevertheless demonstrate alternative approaches. **S+T+ARTS (Science + Technology + Arts)** supports collaboration between artists, scientists, engineers and researchers through residencies, prizes, thematic initiatives and regional networks. Here, cultural and creative actors are financed as contributors to scientific and technological innovation rather than solely as producers of cultural outputs. Similarly, the **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** connects sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion and supports activities related to areas such as circularity, cultural heritage, urban regeneration and neighbourhood transformation. In these contexts, CCIs contribute creative methods and capabilities to wider technological, environmental and societal innovation processes.

European structural and investment funding also provides opportunities for CCIs through regional development, employment and social inclusion. The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** supports areas such as creative clusters, cultural infrastructure and heritage, while the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** supports skills development. Their contribution to CCI innovation depends on how national and regional programmes recognise creative actors and connect support for innovation, skills and shared infrastructure.

At the other end of the innovation-financing spectrum, the **EIC Accelerator** offers grants and investment for start-ups and SMEs developing innovations with the potential to create or disrupt markets. It can support eligible creative businesses with strong innovation and growth potential. Its focus on development and scaling within individual companies, however, makes it less suited to financing shared exploration or the coordination of a wider creative innovation portfolio.

A similar issue is visible at the level of the wider European research and innovation system. The **European Research Area (ERA)** seeks to strengthen coordination and cross-sector collaboration between academia, industry, public authorities and civil society, yet cultural and creative actors have had limited visibility in the policy discussions shaping the new ERA. This indicates that, despite the emergence of dedicated initiatives such as EIT Culture & Creativity, CCIs are not yet systematically embedded as core actors within European research and innovation policy.

4.1.3 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MEASURES

National and regional programmes complement EU instruments and are particularly important for smaller organisations, freelancers, local initiatives and experimental forms of innovation that may struggle to access larger European programmes. Their proximity to local cultural and innovation ecosystems also enables financing mechanisms to respond more directly to territorial and sector-specific conditions.

Existing initiatives illustrate different approaches. Belgium's **ST'ART investment fund** provides loans and co-investment mechanisms tailored to creative sectors, combining public intervention with private investment participation. France's **Fondation du patrimoine** demonstrates a blended model combining donations, sponsorship, public subsidies and local partnerships for cultural heritage and community-rooted development. Capacity-building initiatives such as the EU co-funded project **Creative FLIP** have supported financial capability, innovation skills, intellectual property strategies and cross-sector collaboration among creative professionals and SMEs.

Regional initiatives add further models. The **GROWit** regional technology accelerator in Croatia combines financial support with mentoring, internationalisation and business-development assistance, while **FI4INN** supports Central European regions in co-designing innovative financial instruments for research and innovation. These examples illustrate support for business development and for the design of regional financing instruments. They represent selected approaches rather than the full range of possible funding models.

Despite these developments, national funding systems often remain characterised by fragmented project financing, short-term calls and administrative procedures that are poorly aligned with the iterative and experimental character of CCI innovation. Co-financing requirements limited institutional capacity and territorial inequalities continue to create barriers, particularly for smaller and community-rooted actors. National and regional policy nevertheless provides significant scope for further experimentation with blended finance, revenue-based financing, social impact investment, participatory funding and digitally enabled approaches, as well as stronger integration between cultural, innovation, regional-development and sustainability policies.

The mapping shows that many relevant instruments already exist. Their contribution to open innovation depends on how they connect within portfolios and whether they sustain collaboration, shared resources and development beyond individual projects.

5 Current challenges

The research, Policy Lab and Community Reviews, considered alongside the mapping of existing measures, identify eight key gaps that financing policy needs to address. They concern how individual instruments work and how they support participation and collaboration in open innovation ecosystems.

- **Fit with different innovation needs.** Funding requirements do not consistently accommodate the diversity of creative business models, intangible assets and organisational forms. Shared exploration, collaborative projects and development within organisations need different financing arrangements and expectations about results.
- **Connections between programmes.** Different eligibility rules, application processes and funding schedules make it difficult to combine support across policy areas and levels of government. Partners working within the same innovation portfolio may face disconnected requirements.
- **Continuity beyond individual projects.** Follow-up finance is uncertain, and support for coordination, shared resources and relationships often ends with a grant. This puts both promising innovations and the capacity for further collaboration at risk.
- **Complementarity between sources of finance.** Public funding, private investment and community finance are not consistently connected around the needs of an initiative or portfolio. Gaps in risk-sharing and co-investment limit suitable combinations, while some activities continue to require sustained public support.
- **Mutual knowledge and trust.** Creative actors and financiers do not always have the knowledge needed to assess opportunities and work together. Intermediaries that bridge these gaps and coordinate partnerships often lack reliable resources.
- **Recognition of different forms of value.** Assessment can overlook learning, shared knowledge and cultural, social or environmental benefits. Expectations centred on short-term outputs or company growth do not suit every form of innovation.
- **Evidence for financing decisions.** Limited comparable information on financing performance, risk and longer-term results makes it difficult to assess opportunities and learn from experience. Appropriate measures and documented examples are needed without imposing a single definition of success across diverse activities.
- **Capacity to participate.** Administrative demands, upfront costs and co-financing requirements restrict participation by smaller actors and less-resourced regions. Unequal access to technology, infrastructure and expertise further limits their ability to contribute to joint innovation.

6 Policy recommendations

The following recommendations set out how funding can support open innovation by, for and with CCIs. They combine changes to existing instruments with new arrangements for financing shared exploration, collaborative development and the wider use of innovations.

The recommendations are organised through the ekip Innovation Ecosystem Building Blocks, with Investment & Funding as the focus. They address how financing interacts with governance, skills, infrastructure and networks, technology, social participation and sustainable competitiveness. Together, they concern both access to suitable finance and the conditions that enable creative actors to combine their expertise and innovate with partners across sectors.

The innovation portfolio approach helps connect activities and partners around a shared direction, while allowing them to learn and adapt. The Zone Model helps match finance to different types of innovation work, and the OPSI Model informs expectations about uncertainty and results. These approaches support the design of financing arrangements suited to different purposes and contexts.

Public cultural funding retains its distinct purposes. Public and private finance can contribute in different combinations according to the work involved, its risks and the value it creates. The proposed actions include mechanisms to test, evaluate and develop into regular funding practice where they prove effective.

BUILDING BLOCK: INVESTMENT & FUNDING

Recommendation 1: Develop flexible financing that matches how creative innovation works.

Why this matters:

New funding models need to address how money is allocated, when it becomes available and what recipients are expected to return. Adding another instrument will have limited value if it follows the same assumptions about fixed teams, predictable outcomes and company growth. Financing should accommodate individual ventures and joint innovation involving changing groups of creative actors. Where partners use an innovation portfolio approach, different instruments can support related activities without requiring every activity to generate a financial return.

Policy actions:

- **Develop and pilot a European Creative Investment Framework.** Establish a dedicated financing mechanism for creativity-led innovation that existing programmes struggle to support, including joint work across industries. Give it an explicit mandate to fund uncertain outcomes, recognise different forms of value and support collaboration beyond individual projects. Combine grants and repayable finance according to the activities supported, with a defined allocation for ambitious experimentation. Where funding supports an innovation portfolio, assess risk and results across the connected activities, allowing some experiments to end without a usable solution where they generate useful learning. Include resources for the intermediaries and shared capabilities that make this work possible. Test whether the mechanism reaches activities and partners that existing instruments miss and use the findings to guide its further development.
- **Create dedicated funding for shared exploration.** Offer grants that allow partners to investigate a challenge, test ideas and establish whether further collaboration is worthwhile before presenting a fully defined project. Cover facilitation, access to expertise and early experiments. Use the yellow zone of the Zone Model to distinguish this work from project delivery and organisational investment.

- **Make development funding adaptable.** Provide finance when costs fall due. Make proportionate advance payments a normal option and align payment schedules with the costs of delivery. Where confirmed grants are paid later, test affordable short-term finance against those payments, subject to the grant terms. Specify who bears the cost and risk of delays. Assess whether these arrangements allow actors with limited reserves to participate without taking on unsustainable debt. Release funding through agreed review points that allow activities to continue, change direction or close. Permit justified changes to budgets and participating teams within clear limits. For innovation portfolios, allow resources to move between related activities as evidence develops, rather than requiring every original proposal to be completed unchanged.
- **Test repayment models suited to creative income.** Where future income is plausible but uncertain, test recoverable grants and capped revenue-linked finance. Define which income triggers repayment, how payments are calculated, the maximum amount payable and the duration of the agreement. State what happens if income arrives late or never materialises, including when repayment obligations end. Compare these models with loans and equity, taking account of costs, ownership and the risks carried by recipients.
- **Develop targeted co-investment and risk-sharing arrangements.** Combine public and private finance where this enables viable innovation that would otherwise struggle to secure investment. Specify who carries losses, in what order and up to what limit, and how returns are shared. Where public funding absorbs an initial layer of losses, explain why this is necessary, limit the public exposure and ensure that private partners retain a meaningful share of risk. Assess whether the arrangement enables additional activity and improves financing terms for recipients.
- **Use smaller awards to open routes into ambitious collaboration.** Provide cascade funding, innovation vouchers and paid feasibility assignments through which freelancers and micro-enterprises can contribute expertise to larger initiatives. Keep application and financial requirements proportionate to the award. Assess the connection to wider joint work as well as the immediate output.
- **Build comparable evidence on financing performance**. Require publicly supported financing pilots to record repayment, losses, follow-on investment and the costs borne by recipients. Publish aggregated findings to improve instrument design and test assumptions about CCI risk. Distinguish outcomes by business model and type of innovation rather than treating CCIs as one investment category.

Suggested lead: European Commission for the proposed European framework; commissioning funding authority for individual pilots.

Possible delivery partners: EIF, public investment banks, financial institutions, investors, foundations and creative actors.

BUILDING BLOCK: REGULATION & GOVERNANCE

Recommendation 2: Use financing sandboxes to test new contracts, ownership and funding rules.

Why this matters:

Some financing barriers sit in the rules and agreements surrounding money. Funding may assume a fixed consortium, a single owner or an established revenue model, while creative collaboration involves changing teams and shared contributions. Financing sandboxes should provide a defined setting for testing alternative arrangements with real participants and budgets. Their purpose is to resolve specific obstacles and establish whether an approach can be used more widely. Where simpler administration is sufficient, it should be introduced directly.

Policy actions:

- **Select concrete problems for time-limited experiments.** Each sandbox should identify the obstacle, the proposed change, the participating actors, the budget and the evidence needed to judge the result. City and regional pilots can provide practical settings, with national or European authorities involved where their rules affect the experiment.
- **Test agreements for changing creative teams.** Develop contracts that allow participants to join or leave collaborative work while maintaining clear responsibility for delivery and spending. Address shared costs, intellectual property and the use of results. Test whether an intermediary can administer funding on behalf of a team while preserving participants' rights and decision-making.
- **Test collective ownership and financing arrangements.** Examples could include cooperatively owned production equipment, community-backed innovation spaces or joint development financed by several creative businesses. Establish how decisions are made, costs and benefits are shared, and participants can leave or resolve disagreements.
- **Bring the relevant authorities into the experiment.** Involve programme managers, legal advisers and regulators according to the issue being tested. Distinguish changes that can be made within existing rules from those requiring formal approval or legislative change. Sandbox participation should not be treated as an exemption from applicable obligations.
- **Require a decision and a usable output from each pilot.** Assess administrative cost, participation, financial viability and the additional innovation enabled. Identify who can adopt, revise or discontinue the approach. Publish practical findings and model agreements, including unsuccessful results, so that other authorities can use the evidence.

Suggested lead: Authority responsible for the rule or programme being tested.

Possible delivery partners: Programme managers, relevant regulators, financial partners and creative participants.

Recommendation 3: Connect funding programmes through coordinated decisions and follow-on routes.

Why this matters:

Creative innovation can draw on cultural, research, regional development and business support within the same initiative. Yet partners may have to repeat applications, reconcile conflicting schedules or pause work while waiting for the next funding decision. The change required is practical cooperation between programme managers. Programmes can retain their distinct purposes while making it easier to connect support for related activities.

Policy actions:

- **Give programme coordination a clear mandate and resources.** Bring relevant European, national and regional programme managers together around selected innovation areas or portfolios. Name a lead organisation, allocate staff time and agree funding responsibilities, decision schedules and referral routes. Make cooperation part of the participating programmes' work plans and review progress against shared objectives. Publish the arrangements so that applicants can plan around them. Involve intermediaries and creative actors in designing and reviewing these arrangements, drawing on their experience of working across programmes.
- **Introduce reusable application information.** Allow applicants to reuse verified organisational details, partnership agreements, prior assessments and evidence of progress. Receiving programmes should request the additional information needed for their own decisions. Reuse should reduce duplication without creating automatic entitlement to further funding.

- **Assess follow-on needs before current funding ends.** Offer reviews involving recipients and potential follow-on funders while the existing work is still active. Identify whether the next need is further exploration, collaborative development, investment or support for adoption. Where justified, provide time-limited bridge funding during the transition.
- **Make combinations of funding easier to administer.** Explain how different programmes can support distinct activities or costs within one initiative. Align reporting dates and accept shared evidence where possible, with clear responsibility for expenditure and no double funding of the same costs.
- **Use joint calls and assessment where policy responsibilities overlap.** Cultural, research, industrial and regional authorities should agree the challenge, budgets and core assessment criteria together. Use joint panels with creative, financial and other relevant expertise, while retaining criteria specific to each programme's purpose. Agree which evidence can be accepted across programmes and report jointly on the connected work, without requiring recipients to submit the same information repeatedly.

Suggested lead: Participating programme authorities, with one named coordinating authority.

Possible delivery partners: Cultural, research, industrial and regional agencies.

BUILDING BLOCK: SKILLS & COMPETENCES

Recommendation 4: Build financial and innovation capability among creative actors, funders, investors and evaluators

Why this matters:

Creative actors and financiers need to understand one another's decisions, constraints and opportunities. General training has limited value if participants cannot apply it when forming a partnership, choosing finance or assessing an investment. Capacity-building should therefore connect learning to real decisions. It should improve financial judgement among creative actors and the ability of funders and investors to assess creative innovation.

Policy actions:

- **Run joint financing clinics around live initiatives.** Bring creative teams, funders, investors and independent advisers together to examine budgets, income assumptions, risks and financing options. Each clinic should produce a usable financing plan or a clear account of what remains unresolved. Protect confidential information and separate advice from funding selection.
- **Provide specialist advice when decisions arise.** Offer access to financial, accounting and legal expertise when actors negotiate contracts, ownership, investment or new income models. Tailor support to the activity and the participant's experience rather than assuming a common route towards equity investment.
- **Introduce reciprocal learning between creative and financial organisations.** Enable fund managers and evaluators to observe creative production and collaborative work. Give creative professionals opportunities to understand how financing decisions are made. Compensate participating practitioners and use the findings to improve guidance and working practices.
- **Train evaluators using documented cases.** Examine successful and unsuccessful financing decisions to identify sound judgement, missing information and unsupported assumptions. Use the Zone Model and OPSI Model to distinguish the needs of exploration, collaboration, improvement and more uncertain innovation.

- **Develop financial capability within teams and education.** Allow creative teams to share specialist expertise instead of expecting every freelancer to manage all financial functions. Connect financial learning in higher and vocational education to collaborative projects, contracts and decisions that participants are likely to encounter in practice.

Suggested lead: Funding agencies and financial institutions for their respective staff and support programmes.

Possible delivery partners: Education providers, independent advisers, creative organisations and practitioner networks.

BUILDING BLOCK: INFRASTRUCTURES & NETWORKS

Recommendation 5: Resource intermediaries to organise joint innovation and support the creative swarm

Why this matters:

Creative actors can combine many specialist capabilities, but bringing those capabilities together requires time, trust and coordination. Intermediaries help the creative swarm become a credible partner in ambitious innovation with research, industry and public services. Their role should extend beyond finding funding opportunities or producing applications. It includes shaping collaboration, connecting resources and supporting decisions throughout the work.

Policy actions:

- **Commission coordination services with clear funding arrangements.** Fund intermediaries to identify opportunities for joint innovation across sectors, bring together complementary expertise, facilitate decisions and connect partners to finance. Specify which functions receive core funding or service contracts, and which may be financed through fees or membership contributions. Maintain public support for functions that serve the wider ecosystem and cannot reasonably be charged to individual users. Avoid rewarding intermediaries solely for the amount of finance secured, which can encourage unsuitable financing choices. Where an innovation portfolio approach is useful, apply ekip's scoping tools to establish a shared direction. Assess the quality and usefulness of collaboration rather than primarily counting events or contacts.
- **Provide shared professional services for creative teams.** Offer budgeting, contracting, rights advice and project administration that smaller actors can access collectively. Set clear service standards and fees, including subsidised access where cost would otherwise prevent participation.
- **Build cross-sector relationships before projects are fixed.** Resource intermediaries to work with research teams, deep-tech companies, manufacturers and public services while challenges and possible responses are still being defined. This gives creative expertise a role in shaping the work, rather than being added only for design or communication at the end.
- **Maintain active maps of capabilities and resources.** Identify available expertise, spaces, equipment, finance and community knowledge, together with interests and conditions for participation. Use existing networks and tools where possible. Keep the information useful through active introductions and follow-up.
- **Connect intermediary services across regions and borders.** Establish referral arrangements and shared access to specialist expertise that individual hubs or regions cannot maintain alone. Make it possible for participants to find suitable partners beyond their immediate network.

- **Keep access and decision-making transparent.** Publish participation routes, selection criteria, service charges and any financial interests held by an intermediary. Separate advisory and selection roles where conflicts arise. Monitor whether new actors can enter and whether opportunities repeatedly concentrate among the same participants.

Suggested lead: Regional or national authority commissioning the services.

Possible delivery partners: Municipalities, creative hubs, clusters, universities and other intermediaries.

BUILDING BLOCK: TECHNIQUES & TECHNOLOGIES

Recommendation 6: Expand shared access to technology and test digital tools that improve financing.

Why this matters:

Technology affects both the cost of creative innovation and the way finance is accessed and administered. Shared access to computing, equipment and expertise can make experimentation possible for smaller actors. Digital tools can also help with funding information, payments and reporting. Support should focus on demonstrated needs. A tool should earn its place by improving access, cost, transparency or control, rather than by being technologically novel.

Policy actions:

- **Pilot pooled access to technology for joint innovation.** Enable creative actors and their partners to purchase or reserve shared computing capacity, software, specialist equipment and technical support. Test access credits and shared service agreements that make these resources available without each participant having to purchase them separately.
- **Cover the full cost of effective use.** Include training, data preparation, accessibility, maintenance and technical assistance alongside equipment or computing costs. Assess whether participants can undertake new work and retain usable results, rather than measuring access only through registrations or hours allocated.
- **Test AI-assisted funding navigation.** Develop tools that help users identify suitable instruments, understand requirements and prepare information. Answers should link to current programme sources and make uncertainty visible. Users should retain control over confidential financial information and creative work.
- **Test digital administration of payments and revenue-sharing.** Compare conventional systems with smart contracts or other tools where there is a defined problem, such as delayed payments, unclear deductions or difficult revenue allocation. Evaluate reliability, total cost, ease of correction and usability. Tests involving new financial or ownership rules should connect to the sandboxes in Recommendation 2.
- **Require portability and accountable decisions.** Funded tools should provide usable data export, understandable records and clear access rights. AI-assisted assessment should allow human review and correction. Participants should be able to change service providers without losing essential records or control over their work.

Suggested lead: Funding body or infrastructure provider commissioning each pilot.

Possible delivery partners: Creative users, technology providers, financial institutions and independent evaluators.

BUILDING BLOCK: SOCIAL DIMENSION

Recommendation 7: Make broader value, fair participation and benefit-sharing part of financing decisions.

Why this matters:

Financing determines whose ideas can develop, whose work is paid and who benefits from the results. Innovation involving CCIs can generate wider economic benefits alongside cultural, social, environmental and civic value, even where financial returns are limited. These contributions require credible assessment without reducing them to a single score or financial equivalent. The aim is to connect the value expected from an activity to an appropriate form of support. Broader benefits may justify public or philanthropic funding even where commercial returns are limited.

Policy actions:

- **Agree a proportionate value framework at the start.** Identify intended beneficiaries, expected results and the evidence needed to assess them. For collaborative initiatives, combine a small set of shared measures with evidence specific to individual activities. Involve creative participants and affected communities in defining what matters.
- **Set assessment criteria that fit the work being funded.** When partners explore a new idea, assess what they have learned, which possibilities they have tested and whether further development is justified. When they improve an existing product or service, assess the improvements achieved and who benefits. For artistic and cultural innovation, consider artistic significance, new forms of expression or participation, and influence on other practitioners, drawing on relevant peer and community perspectives. Wider adoption may be valuable but should not be a condition for recognising artistic experimentation. Use the OPSI Model where it helps clarify the purpose of the work and suitable expectations.
- **Make fair participation an explicit funding condition.** Provide for payment of creative contributions and relevant community participation, including access costs where needed. Examine whether budgets and schedules allow smaller and underrepresented actors to take part. Avoid making unpaid work an implicit entry requirement.
- **Assess how benefits and ownership are shared.** Consider remuneration, access to results and control over creative work alongside the proposed innovation. Funding terms should make the responsibilities and benefits of collaboration understandable to all participants. Protect artistic autonomy and the distinct purposes of public cultural support.
- **Develop, test and adapt impact investment tools for creative innovation.** Bring public funders, foundations, impact investors and creative actors together to test financing that combines financial returns with measurable cultural, social or environmental benefits. Explore emerging approaches to assessing cultural value and structuring funding, including the Culture Finance Standard. Test their suitability across different creative activities, organisational sizes and local contexts, including their cost and reporting burden. Include independent evaluation and disclose any interests held by those developing or assessing the tools. Use the findings to adapt the tools, while retaining public or philanthropic support where financial returns are insufficient.
- **Support longer-term evidence on value.** Follow a proportionate sample of funded initiatives over several years to examine adoption and cultural, social or environmental effects. Combine quantitative evidence with documented experiences, including weak or negative results. Use the findings to improve assessment and funding choices rather than adding reporting requirements to every recipient.

Suggested lead: Funding organisations responsible for assessment and funding terms.

Possible delivery partners: Creative actors, communities, foundations, impact investors and independent researchers.

BUILDING BLOCK: SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVENESS

Recommendation 8: Establish long-term financing that preserves capacity and supports wider adoption.

Why this matters:

Open innovation ecosystems need capacity that survives individual projects and changes in participants. Shared facilities, accumulated knowledge and working relationships can remain valuable even when one activity ends or a new team takes over. Long-term financing should preserve and renew that capacity while supporting the wider use of successful innovations. It should allow priorities and delivery organisations to change, rather than guaranteeing indefinite support to a fixed group.

Policy actions:

- **Pilot multiannual ecosystem funding agreements.** Bring local or regional authorities, national funders and participating partners together to identify the functions that require continuity. Use the building blocks to assess strengths and gaps, agree funding responsibilities and establish review points.
- **Distinguish continuing capacity from project expenditure.** Identify the ongoing costs of shared infrastructure, knowledge stewardship and other essential functions separately from time-limited activities. Establish how these costs will be covered so that useful capacity does not depend on repeated short-term applications.
- **Make renewal and open participation part of long-term support.** Provide regular opportunities for new actors and ideas to enter. Review which functions remain necessary, whether access is fair and whether the organisations delivering them remain suitable. Where delivery changes, arrange the transfer of useful records, resources and knowledge.
- **Connect promising innovations to users and purchasers.** Involve potential users, public services and industry partners early enough to understand adoption needs. Where appropriate, support routes through procurement, licensing, service agreements or follow-on investment. Recognise that wider use can occur across several organisations and places without requiring one company to become much larger.
- **Plan realistic funding for shared resources.** Assess which costs can be met through service income, membership contributions or other revenues and which require continuing public support. Consider affordability before introducing charges. Do not assume that every resource serving a public or shared purpose will become commercially self-financing.
- **Use ecosystem evidence to guide renewal decisions.** Apply methods such as *ekip*'s LIEPT approach to follow funding, activities and significant developments over time. Examine the retention of useful capacity, new collaborations, access to resources, follow-on finance and the wider use of innovations. Use the findings to continue, redirect or end support.

Suggested lead: Regional or municipal authority convening the funding agreement.

Possible delivery partners: National funders, infrastructure providers, intermediaries, creative actors and cross-sector partners.

Together, these recommendations provide a basis for a European Creative Investment Framework. Improving existing programmes remains essential, but some financing gaps may require a dedicated mechanism with its own mandate, funding commitments and approach to risk and value. Such a framework should support creativity-led innovation across sectors, connecting finance for experimentation and development with sustained support for collaboration and shared resources. It should complement public cultural funding and strengthen connections with wider research and innovation programmes. Its purpose would be to enable work that current arrangements struggle to support, while building evidence on which financing approaches are effective.

Implementation should distinguish changes that programme managers can make under existing mandates from those requiring new budgets, revised programme rules or formal approval. For each action, the proposed lead should identify a first step, the resources required and the decisions needed. Where pilots demonstrate effective approaches, responsible authorities should incorporate them into programme rules, funding agreements or service contracts so that their continuation does not depend only on voluntary cooperation.

Annex 1: Methodological note

The policy recommendations were co-created using the *ekip* Policy Lab methodology[5]. The methodology designed for the development of policy recommendations as part of a Policy Lab is divided in two consecutive steps:

1. **Scoping and identification of the problem.** The topic is identified and scoped via desk research, interviews with stakeholders and the input from the different consortium partners. As part of the Policy Lab preparatory work, a scoping document is shared with the participants to prepare them ahead of the day and to ensure a common understanding among participants. The scoping documents for this policy are available at https://ekipengine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/EKIP_Policy-lab_Scoping-Note.pdf
2. **Policy formulation as part of the Policy Lab:** The Policy Lab is a moment of co-creation with the participating stakeholders. The goal of the policy formulation session is to develop, refine and propose together with the participants different policies for the challenges at hand. More information on this Policy Lab is available at https://ekipengine.eu/policies/new-funding-models.

AGENDA OF THE POLICY LAB

Time (CET)	Session
13:00-13:05	**Opening words** Introduction Session Ragnar Siil, Creativity Lab ***Introduction to ekip - European Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Policy Platform and purpose of the workshop***
13:05-13:15 13:15-13:30	**Setting the scene** ***Providing a overview of the policy context, recent developments and key drivers.*** **Key problem statements from the *ekip* Scoping Note** Ragnar Siil, Creativity Lab **Key findings from the *ekip* "Investment in R&I in CCIs" cross-analysis** Laura Galante, Technopolis
13:30-13:50	**Session 1: Mapping challenges and problems** ***The audience will be divided into smaller groups in Zoom breakout rooms to discuss and map challenges and problem.***

[5] Deliverable D10.1 Methodology of Policy Labs

Time (CET)	Session
13:50-14:20	**Plenary discussion on group work results** In this plenary, groups will present their key insights.
14:20-14:30	**Break**
14:30-15:15	**Session 2: Brainstorming solutions** ***Working groups set up same teams of session 1*** Building on the shared map, participants will identify possible solutions. They will revisit the most critical challenges, refining their scope, root causes, and potential areas for intervention. The goal is to shift from problem-focused thinking to systemic insights, using an approach grounded in openness, regeneration, and collaboration.
15:15-15:50	**Plenary discussion on group work results** In this plenary, groups will present their key insights and preliminary proposals.
15:50-16:00	**Collective wrap-up and next steps** Closing remarks will highlight the main takeaways and outline the upcoming phases of the Policy Lab process, including potential integration of the outputs into broader policy dialogues and pilot actions. **Ragnar Siil, Creativity Lab**

PARTICIPANTS AT THE POLICY LAB, ONLINE MAY 19, 2026

Name	Organisation
Tilde Svensson	Future by Lund
Ludovica Corrias	Futura Cinema
Ragnar Siil	Creativity Lab
Hanna Nikander	HAM Helsinki Art Museum
Koen van Vliet	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
Sandra	Culture le Hic
Laura Galante	Technopolis
Sofia Laranjeiro	Creative Business Network
Adrian Debattista	Ministry for Culture, Lands and Local Government, Malta
Aili Hakala	Kiosit Kansalle
Conceição Costa	Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias
Oana Nasui	cultural researcher
Dima Al-Youzbaki	SO Cult - Bridging Cultures
Simten Birsöz İnanç	YERELIZ
Nick Ware	BSB
Cagil Ozdemir	3dots
Erica Brunetti	Trama Plaza

Name	Organisation
Richard Twohig	UCD
Isabelle Verilhac	Bureau of European Design Associations
Else Christensen-Redzepovic	MIDENA Creatives
Kristiina Urb	Creativity Lab
Rasmus Wiinstedt Tscherning	Creative Business Network
Tuğçe Akbulut	EIT Culture & Creativity
Arne van Vliet	Independent advisor
Jens Nymand Christensen	Creative Business Network
Maira Matsimani	Hellenic Ministry of Culture
Katerina Kalimera	MSCOMM
Oona Tikkaoja	Humak University of Applied Sciences
Jose Antonio Gordillo Martorell	Cultural Inquiry
Tiago Prata	City of Malmö - Culture Department
Jorma Sarv	CLAB
Joost Heinsius	Netherlands PlatformACCT
Despina Andriopoulou	Hellenic Ministry of Culture
Anna Klipkova	PPV

AGENDA OF THE VALIDATION WORKSHOP 1

The first Community Review in Brussels June 9, 2026

Time (CET)	Session
14:00-14:10	**Opening words** ***Introduction Session*** **Jorma Sarv, CLAB** *Introduction to ekip - European Cultural and Creative Industries Innovation Policy Platform and purpose of the workshop*
14:10-14:30	**Setting the scene** ***provide a high-level overview of the policy context, recent developments and key drivers shaping sector/domain*** **Agnieszka Drzewoska, European Commission** **DG EAC - Education, Youth, Sport and Culture**
14:30-15:05	**Validation session** *Group work moderated by* **Jorma Sarv, CLAB**

Time (CET)	Session
15:05-15:30	**Collective Wrap-Up and Next Steps** ***Plenary session*** Groups will present their key insights and preliminary proposals. Closing remarks will highlight the main takeaways and outline the upcoming phases of the Policy Lab process, including potential integration of the outputs into broader policy dialogues and pilot actions. **Jorma Sarv, CLAB**

PARTICIPANTS AT THE POLICY LAB, ONLINE MAY 19, 2026

First name	Last name	Organisation
Murat	Sezgi	3dots
Ellen	Loots	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Virginie	Civrais	St'art invest
Annita	Douka	STPLN
Tina	Winkel	Europe Direct & Garagen-Campus Chemnitz
Çağıl	Özdemir	3dots
Anita	Debaere	Pearle*-Live Performance Europe
Edwin	Korver	Department Culture, Youth, Media Flanders
Jessica	Fuller	Úcaire Consulting Ltd
Arne	van Vliet	Independent advisor
Carlo	Vuijlsteke	IDEA Consult
Maciej	Hofman	European Cultural Foundation
Inga	Yakymenko	Ukrainian Cultural Space
Jeroen	van der Aa	TU Delft - Industrial Design Engineering
Annemie	Verlinden	Cultuurloket
Ruba	Saleh	ICHEC Brussels Management School
Sergio	Galasso	Itinerari Paralleli ETS
Roisin	Caffrey	IETM
Julia	Sattler	Goethe-Institut Brussels
Mateja	Rot	Artist
Jorma	Sarv	Creativity Lab
Kristiina	Urb	Creativity Lab
Drzewoska	Agnieszka	European Commission, DG EAC
Tille	Peters	IDEA Consult

AGENDA OF THE VALIDATION WORKSHOP 2

The second Community Review, June 18, 2026, in Athens

Time	Session
17:30-17:45	Opening words **Michalis Strangos, MSCOMM** *Introduction to Community Review discussion, introduction of participants.*
17:45-18:15	Setting the scene **Ragnar Siil, CLAB** *Introduction to ekip and Policy Engine Model. Introduction of draft Policy Recommendations and the wider policy context with trends and challenges.*
18:15-19:45	Validation session *Roundtable discussion with interventions by all participating experts. Aim to highlight priorities for developing new funding models for open innovation ecosystems in and with CCIs, and comment draft policy recommendations. Discussion moderated by* **Ragnar Siil, CLAB**
19:45-20:00	Wrap-Up and Next Steps Closing remarks to summarise the main takeaways and outline the upcoming phases of the Policy Lab process, including potential integration of the results into final recommendations.

PARTICIPANTS AT THE SECOND COMMUNITY REVIEW, JUNE 18, 2026, IN ATHENS:

Name	Position	Organisation
Konstantinos Fouskas	Professor of Digital Entrepreneurship and Technological Innovation, Head of Technology Transfer Office	University of Macedonia
Vasilis Siemos	Head of Business Accelerator, "Archimides" Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Ioannis Mertzanis	Chief Executive Officer	SPACE HELLAS S.A.
George Nikolaou	Strategy Analyst, Business Innovation Unit - NBG Business Seeds	National Bank of Greece
Jerry Zagoritis	Founder and Chief Strategist	Campaign Lab (Brussels)
Panagiotis Vlachos	Communications & Strategy Expert	Panhellenic Socialist Movement
Andreas Perivolaris	Venture Capital, Fund Operations & Strategic Finance	Stanton Capital
Konstantinos Papadakis	Founder	Gaply Venture Studio, Doha
Toni Attard	Director	Culture Venture (Malta)
Cesare Fiala	Director	Culture Hind (UK)
Fotini Gallou	Social Entrepreneur, Publisher	Newspaper "Ta Horiatika"

PARTICIPANTS AT THE SECOND COMMUNITY REVIEW, JUNE 18, 2026, IN ATHENS:

Name	Position	Organisation
Lefteris Galanos	Head of Press Office	MSCOMM
Alkistis Skopetea	Creative Strategist	MSCOMM
Tasos Palivos	Chief Operating Officer	MSCOMM
Michalis Strangos	Founder	MSCOMM, Industry Disruptors - Game Changers
Dimos Binetzis	Political Analyst	MSCOMM
Maria-Luisa Zacharaki	Content & Conference Manager	BEYOND Expo, MSCOMM
Katerina Kalimera	Communications Expert	MSCOMM
Ragnar Siil	Director	Creativity Lab