

Up Grants 2026: Culture for Democracy

Topic and strands

[Up Grants 2026](#) will explore how socio-cultural centres nurture democracy by promoting participation and stimulating creativity and collective action. Submitted projects will have to focus on one of the following strands:

Strand 1: Digital ethics and democracy

How can socio-cultural centres serve as spaces for online democratic participation, digital citizenship, and ethical political expression?

In a time when digital technologies shape civic life, socio-cultural centres can turn digital spaces into places of dialogue, transparency, and shared creation.

We invite innovative projects that:

- Use ethical digital tools to strengthen civic engagement and participation;
- Explore ethical and inclusive digital practices;
- Promote media literacy and critical thinking in communities;
- Develop hybrid or participatory digital formats connecting different stakeholders;
- Create collaborative digital spaces for collective expression and democratic action.

Projects may address digital democracy, creative online activism, participatory media, or artistic approaches to ethical technology.

For a definition of *ethics*, you can refer to our dedicated [publication](#).

Strand 2: Dialogue in times of polarisation

How can socio-cultural centres bridge divides and nurture dialogue in increasingly polarised societies?

Amid growing political, social, and cultural fragmentation, socio-cultural centres act as safe spaces of encounter, where diversity becomes a generative source and creativity is key.

We encourage innovative projects that:

- Design dialogue-based methods to address social or political tensions;
- Use arts and storytelling to foster empathy and challenge stereotypes and instrumentalisation of fears;
- Work with educators, journalists, or civic actors to counter misinformation and strengthen media literacy;
- Involve youth, communities and under-represented groups in democratic dialogue and trust-building;
- Promote critical listening, conflict transformation and collective problem solving through creative practices.

Examples include participatory theatre, community dialogue labs, intergenerational debates, and other artistic or community-based practices fostering social cohesion.

Strand 3: Participation and cultural resistance

How can socio-cultural centres act as laboratories of civic participation and spaces of cultural resistance in times of crisis?

Socio-cultural centres are not only hubs of creation: they are platforms for collective empowerment, capable of challenging inequalities and defending democratic values through culture.

This strand welcomes innovative initiatives that:

- Use art and participation to respond to social injustice or democratic erosion;
- Enable grassroots movements to organise, amplify their demands and sustain momentum through culture;
- Reclaim public space for civic expression and activism through creative practices;
- Encourage community-led decision-making and participatory governance;
- Foster alliances between citizens, artists, and social movements to advance collective goals.

Projects might include, for example, creative campaigns, performances in public spaces, or collaborative cultural interventions amplifying citizens' voices.

Programme timeline

- **December 4th, 2025:** Launch of the initiative and opening of submissions
- **March 15th, 2026:** Deadline for project submissions
- **March 23rd:** Publishing of all eligible submissions on the Up Grants 2026 platform on the ENCC website
- **March 23rd – April 7th, 2026:** Public and expert voting
- **April 14th, 2026:** Announcement of winners
- **May 21st, 2026:** Award ceremony and workshops by winners at our annual conference in Lisbon, Portugal
- **May – October 2026:** Implementation of follow-up by winners
- **November 15th, 2026:** Deadline for reporting and sharing of project outcomes

Applications

All ENCC members, members of ENCC members, as well as other non-profit or public socio-cultural centres located in countries eligible for [Creative Europe](#) funding can participate in Up Grants. The programme aims to support innovative initiatives that show potential for further development (enlarging it, promoting and giving it more visibility, adding new elements, etc.). Each participating organisation is allowed to submit several projects. All of them must be submitted using the specific [application form](#). Within this form, applicants

are free to use their creativity and choose how to best present their initiative (i.e. using pictures, videos, or presentations).

Please note that the way you present your project is very important for final scoring: make sure you dedicate enough time and care to preparing the application.

Eligibility checklist

1. Organisation eligibility

Each applicant organisation must meet **at least one** of the following conditions:

- Being an ENCC member;
- Being a member of an ENCC member (i.e.: members of local, national or regional networks);
- Being a non-profit or public socio-cultural organisation located in a country eligible for Creative Europe funding.

Furthermore, the organisation must have a **Participant Identification Code (PIC)**, or it must meet the conditions to request one and be willing to register if selected. A PIC is mandatory for winning organisations, as they will have to be listed on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal. You can find more information [here](#).

2. Project eligibility

Submitted projects can be either planned or already in progress. They must have clearly defined goals, budget, and stakeholders, and show potential for future development supported by the Up Grants award. Submissions must meet **all** the following conditions:

- Fit one of the three thematic strands (digital ethics and democracy; dialogue in times of polarisation; participation and cultural resistance);
- Be submitted not later than March 15th, 2026, at 23/59 CET, using the dedicated [application form](#). Late submissions will not be considered eligible;
- The application clearly describes the initiative and its potential future developments;
- The application clearly assesses their impact through the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators relevant to the specific initiative.

Furthermore, submitted projects are expected to:

- Be innovative;
- Contribute to awareness-building and/or reach a wider community or a new type of target group.

The voting process

Public vote

Public voting will be open from March 23rd to April 5th, 2026. Everyone with access to our website can vote. Each voter can vote for a maximum of two projects in each strand, for a total of six votes. Only one vote can be cast per project.

Expert vote and evaluation

The jury of experts gathers experts related to the three thematic strands, plus a member of the ENCC Board of directors, and a member of the ENCC coordination office. Experts will evaluate each project against six aspects: innovation, awareness-building, impact, engagement of the local community, additionality of the support, and relevance of the project within the Up Grants framework. Each aspect will have equal importance and members of the jury will assign a mark from 0 to 2 to each of the six aspects per project, with 12 being the highest score.

Additional points will also be awarded to actions involving wider audiences and cooperation beyond cultural centres, territorial development, and civic participation.

Scoring

The winning projects will be determined by a combined evaluation process integrating expert and public voting. The final score for each project will be the result of the mathematical combination of two components:

- A score based on the number of online votes received;
- A mark assigned by the jury of experts evaluating the project's quality, impact, and relevance.

In order to be rewarded, a project must therefore achieve both a strong jury score and a high level of public support.

Winning projects will be asked to implement their follow-up plan in cooperation with the ENCC office from June to the end of October 2026. A short report, including all supporting material, is expected by November 15th, 2026.

Thank you for your interest in participating in Up Grants. For any questions, consult the FAQ section at the end of [this](#) page or contact us at upgrants@encc.eu.