



NGF CIIC Learning Communities for IX Talent and Skills

Call for proposals

Social Sciences and Humanities
Taskforce for Applied Research SIA

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1 Introduction

This Call for Proposals explains the application procedure for the ‘NGF CIIC Learning Communities for IX-talent and Skills’ funding round, which forms part of the National Growth Fund programme Creative Industries Immersive Impact Coalition (CIIC). The CIIC proposal has been approved by the Dutch government under the National Growth Fund. This Call for proposals falls under the responsibility of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), with the SIA Steering Committee acting as the lead organisation. As this Call for proposals is part of the National Growth Fund, different conditions may apply compared to regular Calls for proposals issued by NWO and the SIA Steering Committee.

In this Call for proposals, you will find information on the objective of this programme (Chapter 2), the conditions for the grant application (Chapter 3) and how your application will be assessed (Chapter 4). You will need this information to submit a grant application. Chapter 5 sets out the grant obligations that apply in the event of a successful application, Chapter 6 contains the contact details and Chapter 7 the appendices.

1.1 Background

NWO and the National Growth Fund

Through the National Growth Fund, the government will invest in projects that ensure long-term economic growth during the period 2021–2025. The National Growth Fund invests in, amongst other things, research, development and innovation projects. In some of these projects, NWO is involved as one of the implementing organisations, for example in organising grant programmes for scientific research or scientific talent.

1.2 Available budget

The grant ceiling for this Call for Proposals is €10,800,000. The Call comprises six research themes as described in section 2.1. It is expected that between 6 and 12 applications will be awarded under this Call for Proposals.

Based on the assessment criteria in section 4.3.1, the assessment committee will draw up a single comprehensive ranking of all applications eligible for funding, regardless of the theme. The assessment committee will then recommend the following applications for funding:

1. first, the highest-priority application;
2. followed by the remaining five research themes with the highest priority;
3. if, after step 2, the funding ceiling has not yet been exhausted, the committee will propose the next highest-priority applications. This may result in no applications being awarded for some themes and more than one application being awarded for others.

1.3 Submission deadline(s)

When submitting your application in ISAAC, you will need to enter further details online. You should therefore start submitting your application at least 1 day before the deadline for this Call for proposals. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The deadline for submitting applications is **3 November 2026**, before 14:00:00 CET.

The deadline for submitting a request for assessment of organisations based in the Netherlands (see section 3.1.2) is 20 working days before the submission deadline, by 6 October 2026 at 14:00:00 CEST.

The deadline for submitting a request for assessment of foreign organisations (see section 3.1.2) is 20 working days before the submission deadline, by 6 October 2026 at 14:00:00 CEST.

2 Objective

This chapter describes the programme's objective and its social impact.

2.1 Programme objective

2.1.1 Objective of the NGF-CIIC Programme

On 15 March 2024, the government gave the go-ahead for the first phase (2025–2027) of the National Growth Fund programme Creative Industry Immersive Impact Coalition (CIIC), which runs until 2029. The programme is funded by the National Growth Fund and falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and, organisationally, under CLICKNL, the knowledge and innovation network for the creative industry.

CIIC is the incentive programme for Immersive Experiences (IX). The content of this programme has been developed in close collaboration with the creative industry and the application domains. The Innovation Agenda (see section 7.6.1) serves as the compass for this incentive programme.

IX provide an immersive user experience in which digital and physical elements converge. It is not just about the technology itself, but also about the experience and its impact. IX therefore go beyond hardware such as VR and AR headsets. They can be regarded as an additional digital layer added to reality, enabling deeper and richer experiences.

The aim of the CIIC incentive programme is to capitalise on the opportunities in the field of IX in the Netherlands. This is because investing in the development of knowledge, research and innovation in the field of responsible and effective IX enhances the Netherlands' sustainable earning capacity in the medium to long term. Developments in this innovative field offer economic opportunities in particular for:

- strengthening sectors such as the creative industries, ICT and the arts, where IX forms the core as a discipline;
- other sectors and areas of application where IX can contribute to solving societal issues;
- creators, providers and users of high-quality IX applications and content.

IX is also expected to have a major societal impact in the coming decades as a driver of the third digital transition.

To mitigate any potential negative societal effects of this digital transition, safeguarding public values such as privacy, self-determination, health and safety forms an important part of the CIIC incentive programme. To this end, a guideline and a [Public Values](#) self-assessment tool have been drawn up.

To create the desired economic and societal impact with IX, we invite researchers, (semi-)governmental bodies, civil society organisations and the business community to collaborate with IX creators and users in co-creation on applied research into IX.

The CIIC funding programme comprises five action lines. NWO is involved in three of them:

- Action Line 1: Knowledge and Methods
- Action Line 2: Human Capital
- Action Line 3: Ecosystem and Facilities

The SIA Coordination Body acts as the programme coordinator and is responsible for the development and implementation of various calls for proposals for the aforementioned action lines. The emphasis is on applied research by researchers from knowledge institutions in collaboration with SMEs and/or the public sector. Further information on the other Calls for Proposals that SIA develops and implements within the CIIC incentive programme is available on the [funding page](#) of this Call for Proposals.

Further information on the entire CIIC incentive programme is available at www.ciic.nl.

2.1.2 Objective of NGF-CIIC Learning Communities

2.1.2.1 Human capital CIIC

This Call for proposals is part of programme line 2 of the CIIC programme: Human Capital for CIIC. The aim of this strand is to expand the talent pool for IX, so that the ambitions to accelerate and scale up IX can be realised. Sufficient and well-trained people are essential to this. This applies to the entire IX chain: from the creators to the areas of application and all links in between. And for all levels of education, from vocational education (MBO) up to and including higher education (WO).

A more detailed explanation of CIIC's human capital approach is set out in section 7.7.

2.1.2.2 Aim of the call

In response to the fast-evolving IX domain and rapid market and technological developments, CIIC aims to bring innovation, work, and learning closer together. Knowledge development and application go hand in hand with the development of knowledge, skills and competences of both young talent and professionals already in the workforce.

This Call for Proposals therefore focuses on the establishment of learning communities. Learning communities help to expand the pool of knowledge and talent for CIIC and to enrich the knowledge, skills and competences of professionals already working in the field. Furthermore, through applied research and evaluation, they can ensure the development of the knowledge needed to accelerate and scale up these processes.

Central to this Call for proposals is the question of how we can arrive at effective concepts for learning, working and innovating. This concerns urgent research themes drawn from practice. All partners will develop and investigate new learning and development models. They will do so through interaction and co-creation, with a view to potential upscaling. This involves the following research themes and example questions:

1. Increasing knowledge and understanding of IX among users. What learning models can we develop to offer IX as an alternative to traditional forms of education and communication, thereby increasing users' understanding and application of IX?
2. Joint development throughout the entire process and development cycle of IX, from content to finished product and application. What learning models can we develop to collaborate in an application-oriented manner throughout the entire IX process, from onboarding and UX to making IX products market-ready?
3. Translating practical questions into IX concepts. What learning models can we develop to translate societal issues (climate, discrimination, care) into IX concepts?
4. Distribution & infrastructure. What learning models can we develop to support the scalability of IX concepts?
5. Reuse, Further Development & Scaling Up. What learning models can we develop to support the modular development and multi-purpose application of IX concepts, from (serious) games to societal applications?
6. Public values. What learning models can we develop to support creators, researchers and practitioners in realising safe, responsible and universally accessible IX?

The applicant determines for themselves which research theme the application falls under and indicates this on the application form. An application may also combine multiple research themes. In that case, the applicant must select one main theme and provide a reasoned explanation of the relevance to one or more themes. The applicant is then required to indicate the area(s) in which they wish to apply their development and research theme by selecting at least one of the following application areas on the application form:

1. Arts & Culture
2. Media & Entertainment
3. Creative Business Services

2.1.2.3 Characteristics of the learning communities

Learning communities are public-private partnerships between organisations in the fields of research and education (vocational, higher vocational and university education), businesses and/or public organisations. These include creative makers, creative service providers and the professionals needed to bridge the gap to the application areas. Their shared objective is to rapidly translate relevant knowledge into new learning solutions and to test and further develop these in practice. This applies both to the lifelong learning market (upskilling and reskilling of working professionals and career changers) and to the progression of young talent from preparatory education into the workplace. The learning solutions are integrated into day-to-day work and driven by innovation.

The concept of a learning community is based, in terms of vision, working method and concept, on the conceptual framework and principles formulated in the Roadmap Human Capital Top Sectors, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, use is made of the knowledge and tools from the National Network of Learning Communities.



Figure 1 Definition and characteristics of a learning community from the Roadmap for Human Capital in Top Sectors

The learning communities envisaged in this Call for Proposals have the following characteristics:

1. Clear structure and governance

The learning communities have a clear structure, governance framework and plans for long-term sustainability. Role profiles are linked to the learning communities (such as community managers, coordinators and facilitators), who will be actively involved in the organisation, communication, knowledge exchange and liaison between all parties involved in the learning community.

2. Collaboration across education, research and practice

The learning communities promote collaboration between (SME) enterprises, educational institutions (vocational, higher professional and university education), research organisations (higher professional, university, TO2 and other research organisations) and (private) parties offering retraining and further training in the field of IX competencies. They strengthen the link between education, research and the labour market by developing and implementing innovative learning pathways, sharing facilities, promoting the exchange of knowledge and expertise, and by contributing to technology transfer, networking, information dissemination and collaboration among the participants of the learning community.

3. A learning and research programme with concrete outputs.

The intended output of the learning communities is described in their learning and research programme:

- a. The learning programme contains learning activities/offers/packages designed to link knowledge generated by research more quickly with education and practice, and outlines how this continuous development process is managed, implemented and ensured. Examples of these learning activities include use cases, practical sessions, training courses, work placements or learning environments (or a form of practice-based learning), certification, and experiments with innovative teaching formats and learning methods/practices for training IX professionals.
- b. The research programme comprises thematic/focus areas and applied research activities aimed at multi-year challenges, within which concrete issues relating to the human capital of practice partners (SMEs) are addressed within selected themes and application sector(s), as described in 2.1.2.2.

The preconditions for applications for learning communities are described in further detail in sections 3.2 and 3.5.

Learning Communities for the benefit of IX professionals operate within a national IX ecosystem and also fulfil national roles and functions within it. At the same time, learning communities may also emerge from strong regional ecosystems, for example due to a certain regional concentration of activity. The added value for the IX ecosystem, as currently envisaged, will arise from a combination of several regionally embedded learning communities that form a national network of IX learning communities.

In doing so, close attention will also be paid to synergy with the IX labs (and overlap will be avoided).

2.2 Societal impact

New knowledge and insights from scientific research can make a significant contribution to solutions for the societal challenges of today and tomorrow. Think of the energy transition, health and care, or climate change. Through interaction and coordination between researchers and potential knowledge users, the likelihood of knowledge being applied increases, and with it the likelihood of societal impact. Societal impact here refers to changes that are (partly) the result of knowledge and expertise generated by research. These changes contribute to the well-being of people, the planet and society for this and future generations. Through its impact policy, NWO promotes the potential contribution of research to societal issues by encouraging productive interactions with societal stakeholders, both during the development and implementation of the research. It does so in a manner consistent with the objective of the funding instrument. NWO encourages researchers to take a broad view of the potential desired and undesired impacts of their research.

2.2.1 Tailored impact

Depending on the objective of the funding instrument, NWO selects an appropriate approach that optimally supports the potential for societal impact. The primary objective of the funding instrument determines the choice of approach that NWO employs to promote knowledge utilisation at various stages of the project (application, implementation, post-project) and the effort required of applicants and partners.

In this programme, societal impact is aligned with the NGF-CIIC programme. In this way, NWO and the CIIC incentive programme contribute to the impact goals in line with the objective of the National Growth Fund.

The societal impact in this programme must align with the following objectives:

- Knowledge and methodologies for the design and development of responsible IX;
- Sufficient designers and developers capable of creating and applying IX;
- A strong IX ecosystem that innovates, designs, develops, applies, markets and scales up, supported by high-quality facilities and training;
- Policy that facilitates and encourages the development and use of safe, ethical, sustainable and inclusive applications of AI.

The application describes the intended impact of the NGF-CIIC Learning Communities project on research, education and practice, and how this intended impact contributes to achieving which of the above impact goals.

3 Eligibility criteria for applicants

This chapter sets out the conditions that apply to your grant application. It begins by describing who is eligible to apply for a grant (section 3.1) and what you can apply for a grant for (section 3.2). You will then find the conditions for preparing and submitting the application (sections 3.3 and 3.4) and specific grant conditions (section 3.5).

3.1 Who can apply

Applications are submitted by a main applicant and one or more co-applicants. An application is drawn up by a consortium, which may include other participants in addition to the applicants.

There are four categories of participants in a consortium:

1. Main applicant
2. Co-applicant(s)
3. Collaborating partners
4. Co-funders

A consortium must consist of at least:

- a. 1 research organisation as the main applicant;
- b. at least 3 industry partners consisting of SMEs and/or organisations with a public remit, such as public sector organisations and government bodies;

The consortium may be supplemented by medium-sized or large companies, provided that conditions a and b are met.

The owner of the learning community is part of the applicant consortium, either as the main applicant or a co-applicant.

The conditions per participant are explained in more detail in the following sections. Only the main and co-applicants are eligible to receive funding under this Call for Proposals.

3.1.1 Main applicant

Researchers may act as main applicants if they are in permanent employment (and therefore have a paid employment contract for an indefinite period*) or hold a tenure-track contract with one of the following research organisations:

- Universities and universities of applied sciences as referred to in Article 1.8(1) of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act and the universities listed in the [Policy Rule on Universities in the Kingdom of the Netherlands](#);
- University medical centres, meaning the academic hospitals as referred to in Article 1.13(1) of the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act;
- TO2 institutes;
- KNAW and NWO institutes;
- the Netherlands Cancer Institute;
- the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen;
- NCB Naturalis;
- Princess Máxima Centre.

* Lectors employed by a university of applied sciences and researchers employed by a TO2 institution may also submit an application as principal applicant if they have a fixed-term paid employment contract.

Individuals with a zero-hours contract or a fixed-term contract (other than a tenure track and the above-mentioned exception for lectors employed by a university of applied sciences and researchers employed by a TO2 institution) are excluded from submitting applications.

It may be the case that the applicant's tenure-track contract ends before the intended completion date of the project for which the grant is being applied for, or that the applicant's permanent employment ends before that date due to reaching retirement age. In such cases, the applicant must enclose a statement from their employer in which the organisation concerned guarantees that the project and all persons working on the project for whom funding is being sought will be adequately supervised for the entire duration of the project. Applicants employed by a university of applied sciences or a TO2 institution whose employment contract ends before the intended completion date of the project for which the grant is being applied for must also enclose such a statement.

Applicants in part-time employment must guarantee adequate supervision of the project and of all persons working on the project for whom funding is being sought.

Additional conditions for the main applicant

A main applicant may submit only one application within this Call for Proposals in the capacity of main applicant. A main applicant may also participate as a co-applicant in another consortium within this Call for Proposals no more than once.

3.1.2 Co-applicants

Co-applicants may be employees of:

1. the research organisations listed under 'main applicant' in section 3.1.1;
2. companies and other public and private organisations (hereinafter: companies and civil society organisations) other than the research organisations listed under 'main applicant' in section 3.1.1;
3. research organisations established in the Netherlands that meet the conditions set out in this section 3.1.2;
4. foreign research organisations that meet the conditions set out in this paragraph 3.1.2.

Ad 1

The same conditions as those set out in 3.1.1 apply to the employee of the research organisations referred to in 1.

Ad 2

Employees of organisations referred to in 2 may participate as co-applicants in the consortium provided that:

- they are in permanent employment for at least 0.6 FTE or are self-employed (freelancers);
- their organisation has demonstrable Research & Development (R&D) activities in the Netherlands or is established in the Netherlands;

Additional conditions for co-applicants from SMEs and public organisations:

An SME, including self-employed persons, may only act as a co-applicant if it meets the criteria below:

- An enterprise is defined as: an entity, regardless of its legal form, which carries out economic activity.
- The undertaking is registered with the Chamber of Commerce.
- The company has fewer than 250 employees and either an annual turnover of less than €50 million or a balance sheet total of less than €43 million.

A public organisation may act as a co-applicant only if it meets the following criteria:

- organisations whose purpose is to perform a public and/or statutory task
- have no profit motive or commercial interest
- are (partially) funded and/or subsidised with public funds
- In addition to the public bodies that meet the above criteria, the following organisations are also classified as public organisations:

- local authorities (municipalities, counties, water boards), semi-governmental organisations and independent administrative bodies. These bodies come from sectors including: healthcare and welfare, arts and culture, safety and the living environment, social housing, education
- non-profit organisations that perform public tasks, such as nature and environmental organisations
- healthcare providers with a profit motive or commercial interest, such as physiotherapists or commercial hospitals, provided that the research focuses on practitioners working in these settings
- educational organisations, such as vocational colleges, provided that the research focuses on practitioners working in these organisations

Ad 3 and 4

Dutch and foreign research organisations must meet the following cumulative conditions:

- the organisation must be a foundation, association or legal entity under public law, or, in the case of a foreign organisation, the equivalent thereof in the country of establishment (all other legal forms, including private limited companies and public limited companies – or at least the equivalent thereof in the country of establishment of the foreign organisation – are excluded);
- the organisation must be primarily engaged in the independent conduct of fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development, or in the wide dissemination of the results of those activities through education, publications or knowledge transfer;
- the organisation must be able to declare that it maintains separate accounts for economic and non-economic activities and that undertakings with a decisive influence on the organisation do not receive preferential access to the organisation's research results.

Please note: Prior to the submission of an application, NWO will assess, on the basis of the above conditions, whether an organisation complies with Article 1.1, paragraph 4, of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024 and is therefore eligible to participate as a co-applicant. NWO carries out this assessment partly to verify that no prohibited state aid is being granted.

For the purposes of this assessment, the organisation of the intended co-applicant must submit the following documents by email to ngf-ciiic@regieorgaan-sia.nl no later than 20 working days before the submission deadline (i.e. no later than **6 October 2026 at 14:00:00 CEST**):

- a recent extract from the Chamber of Commerce, or, in the case of a foreign research organisation, the equivalent in the country of establishment
- the memorandum of association and/or current articles of association
- the latest available annual accounts accompanied by an auditor's report¹
- the completed Research Organisation Declaration, available on the funding page of this Call for proposals

The documents must be submitted in English or Dutch. It is permitted to include other relevant documentation. NWO may also request additional information if the above documents do not provide sufficient clarity to determine whether the organisation is eligible to act as a co-applicant.

If the organisation of the intended co-applicant has already been assessed against these conditions within another NWO programme, please contact NWO in good time before the stated deadline via the email address above to clarify whether this organisation needs to be assessed again.

If the organisation of the intended co-applicant fails to submit the documents required for the assessment of the conditions in time, NWO cannot accept the organisation in question as a co-applicant.

¹

Organisations that are not legally required to have their financial statements audited are not required to provide such an audit report. However, they must be able to demonstrate that this legal requirement does not apply to the organisation in question.

3.1.3 Main and co-applicants

The main applicant submits the application via ISAAC, NWO's electronic submission system. During the assessment process, NWO communicates with the main applicant. Once an application has been awarded funding, the principal applicant becomes the project leader and the point of contact for NWO. The principal applicant's research organisation is the main beneficiary and acts as the lead organisation. Co-applicants play an active role in the implementation of the project. The (sub-)project leader(s) and beneficiary(ies) are jointly responsible for the implementation of the entire project.

3.1.4 Collaborating partners

A collaboration partner is a party that does not receive a grant and does not contribute co-funding to the application, but is closely involved in the implementation of the research and/or the exploitation of knowledge. A collaboration partner may also be involved in the establishment and operation of the learning community. A collaboration partner is therefore neither a main applicant, a co-applicant nor a co-funder.

Please note: for staff of organisations participating in the consortium as collaboration partners, no grant for salary or research costs may be applied for as a co-applicant. However, it is possible to reimburse costs by engaging these organisations as third parties via the 'material costs', 'knowledge utilisation' or 'project management' modules (see section 3.2 and Annex 7.1).

3.1.5 Co-funders

A co-financier is an organisation participating in the consortium that contributes cash and/or in-kind resources to the project. For the further specific co-financing conditions applicable to this Call for proposals, see section 3.5.7. The role these organisations play in the preparation, implementation and translation of the research into society must be described in the application.

A cash co-funding partner does not receive a grant from NWO under this Call for proposals. Nor is it possible to claim costs by engaging these organisations as third parties via the Equipment budget module.

3.2 What can be applied for

For each project, a grant of at least €900,000 and a maximum of €1,800,000 may be applied for. The maximum duration of the proposed project is 48 months. The applicant and co-applicants may claim costs for personnel, equipment, investments and knowledge utilisation.

NWO will fund up to 75% of the total project budget comprising the eligible costs as described below and shown in Tables 2 and 3. An application must therefore demonstrate that at least 25% of the total project budget is covered by **funding from sources other than NWO**. At least 50% of the requested grant funds must go to research organisations listed under 'main applicant' in 3.1.1. Furthermore, a maximum of 25% of the requested grant funds may be spent on the establishment and operation of a learning community (further described in 3.2.9).

Funding other than from NWO consists of:

- i. the own contribution, i.e. the non-subsidised portion of the eligible costs contributed by businesses and civil society organisations (see further on in this section);
- ii. the own contribution, i.e. the non-subsidised portion of the eligible costs contributed by the learning community;
- iii. cash (excluding VAT) or in-kind co-funding (see section 3.5.7).

Research organisations listed in section 3.1 under 'main applicant' or under 'co-applicant' under point 1 are not permitted to declare their own institutional contribution as **funding other than from NWO** or to act as a co-funders.

In this Call for proposals, funding may be requested per application to cover the costs of one learning community.

The principal and co-applicants may claim costs in accordance with the available budget modules (including the maximum amounts) listed below. Only claim what is essential for carrying out the project. The rates and an explanation of these budget modules are set out in Annex 7.1.

This Call for proposals distinguishes between the budget modules for research organisations (as referred to in section 3.1.1 under ‘main applicant’ and in 3.1.2 ‘co-applicant’ under 1.), the maximum eligible costs for ‘enterprises and civil society organisations’ (as referred to in section 3.1.2 under ‘co-applicant’ in point 2) and the maximum eligible costs for the establishment and operation of the learning community.

Table 1. Grant percentages by type of applicant.

Type of organisation	Grant percentage
Research organisation (see section 3.1.2 under 1)	100% of the eligible costs for non-economic activities.
Businesses and civil society organisations (see section 3.1.2(2))	Up to 40% of eligible costs.
The owner of the learning community. This owner may be a research organisation (see section 3.1.2(1)) or a business or civil society organisation (see section 3.1.2(2))	Up to 50% of the eligible costs.

3.2.1 Personnel funding

For personnel contributing to the project, a grant may be requested to cover salary costs. The amount depends on the type of appointment and the organisation where the personnel is employed.

The following rate systems may be used in this Call for proposals:

- UNL salary scales + 50% surcharge (see Annex 7.1)
- UMCNL salary scales + 50% surcharge (see Annex 7.1)
- rates from Table 2.1 ‘Average direct labour costs’, column ‘Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT’ of the Government Rates Manual + 50% surcharge (see Annex 7.1)
- Integrated Cost System (IKS) as filed² with RVO for the organisation in question (see Annex 7.5)³
- fixed hourly rate of €60 (see Annex 7.4)

Annex 7 specifies which rate system is available for each type of applicant. The various rate systems are incorporated into the budget format provided by NWO.

3.2.2 Budget modules for research activities by research organisations

The budget modules (including the maximum amounts) set out below apply to research organisations as referred to in section 3.1.1, whether acting as ‘main applicant’ or ‘co-applicant’. Please only request what is essential for carrying out the project. Further details on the budget modules can be found in the annex to this Call for proposals (see Annex 7.1). Activities for which a research organisation applies for funding must qualify as non-economic activities, as referred to in paragraph 20 of the European Framework Regulation on State Aid for Research, Development and Innovation (2022/C 414/01)⁴. Research organisations applying for funding under this Call for Proposals must declare that these activities are of a non-economic nature.

Classification as a non-economic activity is a threshold criterion for eligibility for funding. The assessment committee will therefore evaluate the proposed activities of research organisations on the basis of the degree of independent scientific research, aimed at increasing knowledge and improving understanding (see section 4.3.1).

² NWO adopts the RVO terminology: ‘filed’ also implies that the rates have been approved by RVO.

³ If an applicant wishes to use the IKS rates, this choice automatically implies that they authorise NWO to request the IKS rates from RVO and to share them with the consortium partners of the application when a joint budget is drawn up.

⁴ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028(03)).

3.2.3 Personnel

For the various rate systems that can be used, see section 3.2.1 and section 7.1.

Please note: it is not possible to apply for funding for the employment of the main or co-applicants themselves other than via the budget modules 'Replacement of applicants' and 'Personnel at universities of applied sciences and TO2 institutes'.

3.2.3.1 Personnel at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre (UMC) or a research organisation

For personnel employed at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre (UMC) or another research organisation, as referred to in Article 1.1, first paragraph, sub-paragraphs c to h of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024, salary costs may be claimed for the following positions: postdoctoral researcher, non-academic staff (NWP) and for the replacement of the applicant.

Please note: applying for a grant for the deployment of the principal or co-applicants themselves is only possible via the replacement grant, up to a maximum of 10% of the budget applied for from NWO.

3.2.3.2 Personnel of universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes and other research organisations

It is possible to claim wage costs for personnel at universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes, and/or other research organisations. An unlimited number of positions may be requested in accordance with;

- the rates applicable at the time of grant award from Table 2.1 'Average direct labour costs', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT' of the Government Rates Manual (HOT) + 50% surcharge, or
- Rate in accordance with the integrated cost system (IKS) as filed with RVO for the relevant main or co-applicants.

3.2.3.3 Students

It is possible to deploy students for the project if they are studying at a research organisation mentioned in section 3.1. You may claim the costs of this within the project as material costs. There is no limit to the number of students who may participate in the project.

3.2.3.4 Research Personnel at a research organisation abroad

It is possible to claim salary costs from foreign research organisations for academic personnel.

Please note: prior to the submission of the application, NWO will assess whether the foreign organisation complies with Article 1.1, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the NWO Funding Scheme 2024 (see section 1.3 and section 7.1.1).

3.2.4 Equipment

Funding may be requested for all project-specific material costs. A maximum of 25% of the NWO grant amount applies to these costs.

A maximum of 50% of the material budget applied for from NWO may be used for work carried out by third parties. A maximum of 50% of the grant amount for materials may be applied for on behalf of research organisations abroad.

3.2.5 Investments

Funding may be requested for investments in equipment, infrastructure and other research resources that have economic value or can be reused after the project has ended. Labour costs for personnel who prepare the equipment, infrastructure and other research resources for use may be claimed as part of the investment. The rates and conditions for Personnel apply here, and the costs must be claimed as an Investment. Investments by research organisations may only be made by research organisations referred to in paragraph 3.1.

A maximum of 25% of the grant amount may be claimed for investments.

3.2.6 Knowledge utilisation

Funding may be requested for activities that promote the utilisation of knowledge derived from the research,⁵, in order to increase the societal impact of the research.

It is possible to include an amount for knowledge utilisation. These costs may not exceed 10% of the grant amount.

A maximum of 50% of the grant amount may be requested for knowledge utilisation for research organisations abroad.

3.2.7 Project management

It is possible to allocate a maximum of 5% of the total grant amount to project management. It is not compulsory to make use of this.

3.2.8 Eligible costs for businesses and civil society organisations for research activities

Under this Call for proposals, grants are awarded to businesses and civil society organisations pursuant to Article 25 of the General Block Exemption Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, hereinafter: 'GBER'). For businesses and civil society organisations, the maximum eligible costs are set out in Table 3. For these organisations, a maximum of 40% of the eligible costs will be reimbursed. Further details on these eligible costs can also be found in the annex to this Call for proposals (see section 7.2).

It follows from the GBER that a maximum of €15,000,000 per project may be allocated to each individual enterprise or civil society organisation.

Table 2 Eligible costs for businesses and civil society organisations.

Eligible costs	Maximum amount
Personnel costs for researchers, technicians and other support personnel insofar as they are engaged in the research, as referred to in Article 25(3)(a) of the GBER	Unlimited number of positions in accordance with: - the HOT rates applicable at the time the grant is awarded, as set out in Table 2.1 'Average direct labour costs', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT' of the Government Rates Manual, plus a 50% surcharge, or - a fixed hourly rate of €60, or - a rate in accordance with the integrated cost system (IKS) as filed with RVO for the relevant main or co-applicants.
Costs of equipment and apparatus, as referred to in Article 25(3)(b) of the GBER	Up to 25% of the eligible costs per applicant organisation
Contract research costs, as referred to in Article 25(3)(d) of the GBER	Up to 25% of the eligible costs per applicant organisation
Operational costs, as referred to in Article 25(3)(e) of the GBER	Up to 25% of the eligible costs per applicant organisation

⁵ All activities applied for under this budget module must fall within the definition of 'Knowledge transfer activities' used by the European Commission in the Framework Regulation on State aid for research, development and innovation (OJEU 2022, C 414).

3.2.9 Eligible costs for the establishment and operation of the learning community

Under this Call for proposals, a grant is awarded to the learning community. This grant is therefore awarded pursuant to Article 27 of the General Block Exemption Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, hereinafter: 'GBER'). NWO will reimburse a maximum of 50% of the eligible costs for the establishment and operation of the learning community. The applicant may spend a maximum of 25% of the requested grant amount on the establishment and operation of the learning community.

The budget modules available for subsidising the establishment and operation of the learning community are listed in Table 3 below (see section 7.3 for an explanation of these modules).

Table 3 Eligible costs for the establishment and operation of the innovation cluster/learning community

Budget module	Amount to be applied for (50% of the eligible costs)
Investment costs	Costs for tangible and intangible assets (including personnel costs) for activities aimed at establishing and upgrading the learning community.
Operating costs	Personnel costs and administrative costs for the operation of the learning community.

3.3 Preparing and submitting the application

To prepare your application, please follow these steps:

- Download the application form from the ISAAC online application system or from the NWO website (on the website of the relevant funding instrument).
- Complete the application form.
- Save the form as a PDF and submit it, together with any required attachments, via ISAAC.
- Enter the required details online in ISAAC.

Required attachments:

- budget
- completed and signed declaration of the GBER's terms and conditions (see section 3.5.1: for all organisations making use of this, combined into a single form)
- 'Statements and signatures' form
- form for project participants
- Declaration of own contribution and co-funding (if applicable: per co-applicant from the category of businesses and civil society organisations and per co-funder, combined into a single PDF)
- Declaration of support (if applicable: per partner, combined into a single PDF)
- Declaration of IKS rates (if applicable: for all organisations making use of these, combined into a single form)
- Declaration of appointment and project supervision (if applicable)

The application and any attachments must be drawn up in accordance with the template provided by NWO. Attachments must be uploaded to ISAAC separately from the application. The budget and the project team form must be submitted as Excel files in ISAAC. All other attachments must be submitted as PDF files (without security). Attachments other than those listed above are not permitted.

You must submit your application in Dutch or English.

The use of generative AI is not excluded when drafting your application, provided this is done responsibly. The guidelines can be found on the website ([NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence \(GAI\)](#) | [NWO](#)).

Applications can only be submitted via the online application system ISAAC. Applications not submitted via ISAAC will not be processed.

As the principal applicant, you are required to submit an application via your own personal ISAAC account.

It is important to start your application in ISAAC in good time:

- if you do not yet have an ISAAC account, you must create one in good time to avoid any registration issues;
- new organisations may need to be added to ISAAC by NWO;
- you will also need to enter further details online.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be processed by NWO.

For technical queries, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk; see 'Contact' (Chapter 6).

Does a main applicant and/or co-applicant work for an organisation that is not included in the ISAAC database? You can report this via viarelatiebeheer@nwo.nl so that the organisation can be added. This takes a few days. It is therefore important to report this no later than one week before the deadline.

NWO assumes that the applicant has informed the organisation where they work about the submission of the application and that the organisation accepts the grant conditions of this Call for proposals

3.4 Submission requirements

3.4.1 Formal conditions for submission

NWO will assess your application against all the conditions set out in this Call for proposals, including the conditions below. Only if your application meets these conditions will it be admitted to the assessment procedure. You will be asked to be available after submitting an application to make any necessary administrative corrections and thus (still) meet the conditions for submission.

These conditions are:

- The main applicant and co-applicant(s) meet the conditions set out in section 3.1 and section 7.1.1
- The application complies with the DORA guidelines as described in section 4.1.
- The application has been submitted via the main applicant's ISAAC account.
- The application has been received before the specified deadline.
- The application is written in Dutch or English.
- The budget in the application has been drawn up in accordance with the conditions of this Call for Proposals (using the provided template containing the most recent rates).
- The proposed project has a duration of up to 4 years.
- The application meets the requirements regarding **funding other than from NWO**.
- Applicants using the IKS rate system have authorised NWO to request their IKS rates from RVO.

All required appendices have been completed in full, following any requests for additions or amendments, in accordance with the instructions, and have been drawn up and submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Call for proposals.

3.5 Grant conditions

The [NWO Funding Scheme 2024](#) and the [Agreement on the Funding of Scientific Research](#) apply to all applications, with the exception of:

- Article 1.4(1), (5) and (6) of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024 and Article 2.1 of the Agreement on the Funding of Scientific Research; in the sense that, under project costs in this Call for Proposals, overheads are also reimbursed and that applicants must choose, per (co-)applicant, between: 1) the integrated cost system (IKS), provided their IKS accounting method has been approved by RVO, or 2) the standard NWO rates (UNL, UMCNL, HOT) + a surcharge for 50% of the overheads or a fixed hourly rate (€60);
- Article 1.1 of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024; in the sense that businesses and civil society organisations may apply for funding. In doing so, the State aid framework must be observed;
- Article 4.1.1(4) of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024;

- Article 1.3(1) of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024; in the sense that these eligibility requirements do not apply to researchers and/or representatives of businesses and civil society organisations applying for a grant;
- the phrase ‘without being a main applicant or co-applicant’ in Article 5.1, preamble and sub-paragraph (f) of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024, where an applicant undertaking or civil society organisation provides co-financing in kind.

NWO will not award a grant or will withdraw the grant if it transpires that there is unauthorised state aid within the meaning of Article 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

3.5.1 Conditions of the GBER

NWO will fund applications under this Call for Proposals in accordance with Articles 25 and 27 of the GBER. NWO will not award a grant if it is not sufficiently plausible that the application meets the definitions and conditions of the GBER.

NWO will not award grants to undertakings against which a recovery order is outstanding following a previous decision by the European Commission declaring aid granted by the Netherlands to be unlawful and incompatible with the internal market, with the exception of aid schemes intended to remedy damage caused by certain natural disasters. Furthermore, NWO does not award grants to undertakings in difficulty as referred to in Article 2(18) of the GBER.

The cumulation of grants (or other forms of state aid) for the same – wholly or partly overlapping – eligible costs must not result in the notification thresholds for research and development projects and innovation clusters, as set out in Article 4(1)(i) and (k) of the GBER, being exceeded.

Research activities

Enterprises and civil society organisations as referred to in paragraph 3.1.2(2), which apply for a grant for research activities as referred to in Table 3 of paragraph 3.2 of this Call for proposals, must upload the completed and signed GBER declaration as an annex to the application in ISAAC.

Establishment and operation of the learning community

The owner of the learning community must maintain separate accounts for the costs and revenues of each activity, ownership, operation and use of the learning community in accordance with the applicable accounting standards.

Access to the premises, facilities and activities of the learning community is open to multiple users and is granted on a transparent and non-discriminatory basis.

Enterprises that have financed at least 10% of the innovation cluster’s investment costs may be granted preferential access on more favourable terms. To avoid overcompensation, this access shall be proportional to the enterprise’s contribution to the investment costs, and these terms shall be made publicly available.

The fees charged for the use of the learning community’s facilities and for participation in the cluster’s activities correspond to the market price or reflect the costs thereof, plus a reasonable margin.

Please note: In view of the maximum permitted aid intensity for an innovation cluster, it is not possible under this Call for Proposals to apply for funding for investment and operating costs that can (also) be attributed to an IX Lab that has already been funded under the Call for Proposals CIIC IX-Labs issued by TNO: <https://www.ciiic.nl/en/calls/ix-labs>

All main and co-applicants (see section 3.1) applying for a grant for the establishment and operation of the learning community as referred to in Table 3 of section 3.2 must upload the completed and signed GBER declaration as an attachment to the application in ISAAC.

3.5.2 Knowledge security

In the National Knowledge Security Guidelines, the Dutch knowledge sector (including NWO) and various parts of the central government have laid down guidelines for those within research organisations who are involved in international collaboration and who must weigh up the opportunities and (security) risks involved. Self-regulation by the knowledge sector is central to the approach to knowledge security within the Netherlands.

NWO expects applicants to comply with the research organisation's knowledge security policy. If NWO receives indications that an application or awarded project entails knowledge security risks, NWO may request the applicant or project leader to provide details of the risk-mitigating measures. In addition, NWO may decide to include further conditions in the award letter to protect knowledge security.

The National Knowledge Security Guidelines can be found on the Government website: [Home | Knowledge Security Portal](#).

3.5.3 Data management

The results of scientific research must be capable of being replicated, verified and falsified. In the digital age, this means that, in addition to publications, research data must also be freely accessible as far as possible. NWO expects that research data arising from projects funded by NWO will be made freely available as far as possible for reuse by other researchers. In doing so, NWO applies the principle: 'as open as possible, protected where necessary'. Researchers are expected to make public, at the very least, the data – including non-numerical results – underpinning the conclusions of works published within the project, at the same time as the publication itself. Any costs incurred in this regard may be included in the project budget. Researchers must specify how data arising from the project will be handled in the data management section of the application and in the data management plan following the award of the grant.

Data management section

The data management section forms part of the application. Researchers are asked to consider, prior to the start of the research, how the collected data should be organised and categorised so that it can be made freely available. Often, measures will need to be taken even before the data is generated and analysed to enable storage and sharing at a later stage. If not all data arising from the project can be made public, for example for reasons of privacy, ethics or valorisation, the applicant must provide a reasoned explanation of this in the data management section.

The data management section is not assessed and is therefore not taken into account in the decision on whether or not to award a grant. The committee may, however, provide advice regarding the data management section.

3.5.4 Scientific integrity

In accordance with the NWO Funding Regulations 2024, the project funded by NWO must be carried out in accordance with nationally and internationally accepted standards of scientific conduct, as set out in the Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity (2018). By submitting the application, the applicant commits to adhering to this code. In the event of a (potential) breach of these standards in an NWO-funded project, the applicant must inform NWO immediately and submit all relevant documents to NWO. Further information on the code of conduct and the policy on scientific integrity can be found on the website: [Scientific Integrity | NWO](#).

3.5.5 Ethical statement or licence

It is the applicant's responsibility to ascertain whether an ethical statement or authorisation is required for the implementation of the proposed project. The applicant must ensure that this is obtained in good time from the relevant institution or ethics committee. Whether or not an ethical statement or authorisation is in place at the time of the application process does not affect the assessment of the application. If an ethical statement or permit is required for (part of) the research, the project leader must provide NWO with a copy of this statement or permit after the project has been awarded, and in any case no later than before the start of the part of the project for which the statement is required. The part of the project for which the statement and/or permit is required cannot, of course, be carried out (yet) until such a statement or permit has been provided.

3.5.6 Nagoya Protocol

The Nagoya Protocol ensures the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources (Access and Benefit Sharing; ABS). Researchers who use genetic resources from abroad for their research must familiarise themselves with the Nagoya Protocol ([Home - ABS Focal Point](#)). NWO assumes that they will take the necessary actions with regard to the Nagoya Protocol.

3.5.7 Co-funding

The [NWO Co-funding Scheme](#) applies to all applications.

Additional definitions:

- Co-funding in kind: capitalised personnel and/or material contributions from users,
- Cash co-funding, is used to cover part of the total project costs and, together with the grant provided by NWO, constitutes the necessary financial resources.

It is possible to add co-funders to the application in order to meet the requirement for funding other than that provided by NWO (see section 3.2). Co-funding may also be provided by companies and civil society organisations (as referred to in section 3.1.2(2)) that apply for a grant as co-applicants under this Call for proposals, but exclusively in the form of in-kind contributions, insofar as these costs are necessary for the implementation of the project. A distinction is made between cash co-funding (to be collected by the applicant), which serves to cover the budget for the project activities described in the application, and co-funding in kind, which may consist of personnel and/or material contributions from the organisation concerned.

Research organisations, whether as 'main applicant' or 'co-applicant', may not declare their own contribution as co-funding or as **funding other than that provided by NWO** and may therefore not act as co-funders.

The co-funding must be committed to the main applicant by means of a co-funding declaration. The committed co-funding refers to the net amount. If VAT applies to the committed co-funding, this is added to the committed amount.

The following principles apply to co-funding:

- NWO is the main funder of an application. Applications in which the co-funding from the co-funders amounts to more than 49% of the total project costs will not be considered.
- In-kind contributions are only accepted if the part contributed by the co-funding body forms an integral part of the project activities and can be tracked or identified as a distinct contribution. If necessary, NWO may request further justification and supporting documents regarding the rates applied, as well as adjustments. Furthermore, any in-kind contributions in the form of services and know-how must not already be available at the applicant's research organisation(s).
- Fixed all-inclusive hourly rates are used to capitalise personnel input (man-hours) on a project. For the rates, see the [Government Rates Manual \(HOT\)](#), Table 2 under 2.2 'Average total wage costs per pay scale', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT'. The rate that most closely approximates the actual labour costs should be used.

- Cash co-financing is the net amount that a co-financier pays to the applicant. The applicant invoices the co-financier for the cash co-financing and any VAT.

The following are not permitted as cash/in-kind co-financing⁶ :

- All contributions from public funds (including grants provided by NWO, PPP surcharges and other government contributions).
- Co-funding may not originate from research organisations as referred to in paragraphs 3.1.1 and 3.1.2(1).

Co-funding declaration by participating co-funders

In a co-funding declaration, the co-funder expresses financial support for the project and confirms the pledged co-funding. Co-funding declarations from co-funders mentioned in the application must be submitted as annexes when the application is submitted. The co-funding declaration in which co-funding is pledged must be unconditional, must not contain any resolutive clauses, and must be signed by an authorised signatory of the co-funder. NWO provides a mandatory format for the co-funding declaration on the funding page of this Call for Proposals on the NWO website and in ISAAC.

If the application is awarded, the co-funding partner must confirm its contribution(s) in the consortium agreement. Further arrangements between the co-funding partner(s) and the applicant(s) are also set out in this agreement (see section 5.1.3).

Accountability for cash co-funding and co-funding in kind

The ratio between co-funding (both cash and in-kind) and the grant awarded by NWO in this Call for proposals applies from the submission of an application up to and including the finalisation of the grant. Cash co-funding affects the grant amount awarded by NWO because both NWO's contribution and cash co-funding are used for the same project-specific costs (unlike co-funding in kind).

Ex officio indexation resulting from other applicable rates after submission does not affect the ratio and co-funding requirement for the NWO contribution. For this purpose, NWO bases its calculations on the ratio stated in the application budgets accepted by NWO.

Upon completion of a project, the final grant amount is determined on the basis of the final accounts, the financial conditions and the co-funding ratio as set out in the application budget.

In the event of partial cash co-funding (due to unforeseen circumstances, such as bankruptcies), NWO will base its contribution on the original grant award, taking into account the cash co-funding that has been provided and the applicable minimum co-funding requirement, if applicable.

Cash co-funding in excess of the co-funding requirement affects the ratio applied between co-funding and the grant awarded by NWO. If a project has cash co-funding in excess of the co-funding requirement and, at the time of finalisation, there is partial cash co-funding, the NWO contribution will never exceed the original contribution from the grant award. The proportion of the NWO contribution will then be no more than the contribution resulting from the co-funding requirement.

NWO must be informed at all times of any problems with expected co-funding (cash and/or in kind). In addition to financial consequences for a project, NWO may also require appropriate changes to a project as a request for amendment, so that the research can be continued to the best of its ability.

⁶

Ineligible co-financing in kind is described in the Co-financing Regulations.

4 Assessment procedure

This chapter first describes the assessment in accordance with the DORA principles (section 4.1) and how the assessment procedure works (section 4.2). It then lists the criteria against which the assessment committee will evaluate your application (section 4.3).

The NWO Code of Conduct on Personal Interests applies to all persons involved in the assessment and decision-making process, as well as to the relevant NWO personnel members ([Code of Conduct on Personal Interests | NWO](#)).

The use of generative AI is completely excluded from the assessment of an application. Further information on the policy regarding generative AI can be found on the website ([NWO policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence \(GAI\) | NWO](#)).

NWO strives for an inclusive culture in which there is no place for conscious or unconscious barriers based on cultural, ethnic or religious background, gender, sexual orientation, health or age ([Diversity and inclusion | NWO](#)). NWO actively encourages members of an assessment committee to become aware of implicit associations and to try to minimise them. NWO provides them with information on specific ways to improve the assessment of an application.

4.1 The San Francisco Declaration (DORA)

NWO is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). DORA is a global initiative that aims to improve the way in which research and researchers are assessed. DORA contains recommendations for research funders, research organisations, scientific journals and other parties.

DORA focuses on reducing the uncritical use of bibliometric indicators and eliminating unconscious bias in the assessment of research and researchers. DORA's overarching philosophy is that research should be assessed on its own merits rather than on the basis of derived indicators, such as the journal in which the research is published.

When assessing the scientific track record of applicants, NWO applies a broad definition of scientific output.

NWO asks committee members not to rely on indicators such as the Journal Impact Factor or the h-index when assessing applications. You must not mention these in your application. However, in addition to publications, you may also mention other scientific outputs, such as datasets, patents, software and code, and so on.

For more information on what NWO is doing to implement the principles of DORA, see: [DORA | NWO](#).

4.2 Procedure

The application procedure consists of the following steps:

- submission of the application
- processing of the application
- pre-assessment by the assessment committee
- interview selection
- interview
- meeting of the assessment committee
- decision-making

For this Call for proposals, an external, independent assessment committee will be established, comprising representatives from academia and the professional field with expertise in the subject area. The task of the assessment committee is to assess the submitted applications and the related documents in their mutual context and on their own merits, based on the assessment criteria set out in this Call for proposals.

4.2.1 Submission of an application

A standard form is available for submitting the application on the funding page of this Call for proposals on the NWO website. In your application, you must adhere to the questions set out in this form and to the procedure outlined in the guidance notes. You must also comply with the conditions regarding the maximum number of words and pages.

Your fully completed application form must be received via ISAAC before the deadline (see section 1.3). After this time, you will no longer be able to submit an application. The main applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt after submitting the application.

4.2.2 Processing of the application

As soon as possible after you have submitted your application, you will be informed whether NWO will process your application. NWO determines this on the basis of a number of administrative and technical criteria (see the formal conditions for submission, section 3.4). Only if your application meets these criteria can NWO process it.

Please note that NWO may contact you within two weeks of the submission deadline to request any administrative corrections to ensure that your application (still) meets the submission requirements. You will be given one opportunity to make the corrections, for which you will have ten working days.

4.2.3 Preliminary assessment by the assessment committee

Your application will then be submitted to a number of members of the assessment committee (the preliminary assessors) for comment. The preliminary assessors provide written, substantive and reasoned comments on the application. They formulate these comments on the basis of the substantive assessment criteria (see section 4.3.1) and assign a numerical score to the application for each assessment criterion. The members of the assessment committee assess criterion 1 as 'pass' or 'fail', and criteria 2 to 4 with a score in whole numbers, ranging from 1 to 6, with 6 representing the highest score.

4.2.4 Interview selection

The applications are submitted to the assessment panel. The assessment panel then makes its own assessment based on these, resulting in a ranking list. Subsequently, the 15 highest-ranked applicants receive an invitation to an interview. If, following the interview selection, it appears that two or more applications cannot be distinguished from one another on the basis of their weighted total score, this constitutes a tie (see section 4.2.7). Applicants who do not receive an invitation to the interview are not eligible for funding.

4.2.5 Interview

During the interview, the assessment committee has the opportunity to ask questions. The applicant may respond to these during the interview in the discussion with the committee. In this way, the principle of hearing both sides of the argument is applied. The interview is an important part of the assessment and may lead to a revision of the assessment and the score of the application up to that point.

4.2.6 Meeting of the assessment committee

The assessment committee makes its own assessment based on the available material. In this regard, the preliminary reports provide significant guidance for the final assessment, but are not necessarily adopted in full by the assessment committee. The committee weighs up the arguments of the preliminary assessors (including in relation to one another) and considers whether a satisfactory response was provided during the interview to the critical comments in the preliminary assessments.

Following the discussion, the committee draws up a written recommendation to the board of the SIA Coordination Body regarding the quality and prioritisation of the applications. This recommendation is based on the assessment criteria.

The application must be assessed as ‘sufficient’ for criterion 1 and score at least 4.00 on each of the other three assessment criteria individually to be eligible for the grant (see section 4.3.1).

If, following the discussion of the applications, it appears that two or more applications cannot be distinguished from one another on the basis of their weighted total score, this constitutes an Ex Aequo situation (see section 4.2.7).

4.2.7 Ex Aequo

Whether an Ex Aequo situation exists is determined as follows. The starting point is the prioritisation drawn up by the assessment committee, with final scores rounded to two decimal places. The reference score is the score of the lowest-priority application within the grant ceiling or selection threshold. All applications with a score that is 0.05 or less from the reference score will be taken into consideration. In this way, applications that are within 0.1 of each other are selected. If an Ex Aequo situation occurs at the subsidy ceiling or the selection threshold, the application with the highest score on the ‘quality of the action plan’ criterion will be ranked highest. If this does not resolve the Ex Aequo situation, the application with the highest score on the ‘quality of the consortium’ criterion will be ranked highest. If applications are still tied, the assessment committee will determine the ranking by means of an (anonymous) majority vote (in accordance with Article 2.2.6, paragraph 5 of the NWO Grant Scheme 2024). If a vote also fails to resolve the matter, or is not desired, the Ex Aequo situation will be referred to the decision-making body.

4.2.8 Decision-making

Finally, the board of the SIA Coordination Body reviews the procedure followed and the assessment committee’s recommendation. It then determines the final rankings and decides on the acceptance or rejection of the applications.

4.2.9 Timeline

Below you will find the timeline for this Call for proposals. NWO may deem it necessary to make adjustments to the timeline of this Call for proposals during the ongoing procedure. You will, of course, be notified of this in good time.

Request for review by the research organisation

6 October 2026	Deadline for request for review of research organisation
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Applications

3 November 2026	Deadline for applications
November 2026	Availability of applicants for any administrative corrections to the application
December 2026–January 2027	Consultation with preliminary advisers
February 2027	Interview selection and interviews
March 2027	Assessment panel meeting
April 2027	Board decision
May 2027	Announcement of decision

4.3 Criteria

4.3.1 Substantive assessment criteria

Applications submitted under this Call for proposals will be assessed on their merits against the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Compliance with the R&D&I Framework Regulation⁷

For research organisations: the assessment committee will assess the extent to which the research activities identified in the application as non-economic in nature qualify as independent scientific research by the research organisation within the partnership, aimed at increasing knowledge and improving understanding. The committee will assess this criterion as 'pass' or 'fail'.

Criterion 2: Problem definition and analysis (20%)

The application is assessed on the extent to which:

- the problem statement is clearly formulated and the resulting knowledge and development questions are original and innovative, sufficiently defined, logically related and contribute to the objective of the Call for Proposals and the theme and scope(s) formulated therein to which the application relates;
- the problem statement is urgent and relevant: is the problem statement directly linked to practical issues in working, learning and innovating for the IX? To what extent and in what way is the research and development of theoretical and/or methodological significance?
- the approach and choice of theme are appropriate within the ambitions and themes of CIIC as described in Chapter 2;
- the expected project outputs will contribute to CIIC's human capital programme as described in Chapter 2.

Criterion 3: Quality of the consortium (40%)

The application will be assessed on the extent to which:

- the composition of the consortium is logically aligned with the intended project;
- relevant societal stakeholders and/or (SME) enterprises are involved;
- the consortium partners complement each other in terms of the knowledge, skills and expertise required for the implementation of the project;
- (practical) partners are actively involved in the development of the project, from the formulation of the problem statement and research questions through to implementation;
- the governance structure and internal coherence of, and commitment to, the connection between the components/work packages within the plan are clear;
- the chosen governance structure supports the learning community; the learning community has sufficient personnel, resources and time; the division of roles and tasks is appropriately organised, with attention to specific requirements regarding the necessary expertise of learning community facilitators; the job profiles of these facilitators (such as community managers and coordinators) are clearly and convincingly described;
- the applicants possess expertise specifically relating to the themes requested in this Call for Proposals.

⁷ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022XC1028(03))

Criterion 4: Quality of the learning community's action plan (40%)

The application will be assessed on the extent to which:

- 1 Objectives, vision and strategy
 - there is a clear direction/focus and 'why' for the learning community, related to the problem statement;
 - the detail and clarity of the action plan for the learning community, including a step-by-step plan; the phasing within this (including the strategy for embedding the learning community after the project has ended) and feasibility, in line with the characteristics of the learning community as described in section 2.1.
 - there is sufficient alignment with the (international) knowledge base on learning communities. In this regard, the following are considered:
 - the manner in which it aligns with existing knowledge and evidence-based practice;
 - the manner in which it utilises and remains aligned with ongoing recent developments/stays up to date;

- 2 Learning programme
 - The learning programme clearly describes which innovative learning activities/offers/packages are being developed through use cases and other types of activities;
 - the learning programme clearly and convincingly describes how it is organised, managed, implemented and assured; with a logical structure of who does what, when, why and what it delivers, with measurable (interim) objectives and expected (interim) results;
 - To what extent does the activity plan clearly describe the roles that practice, research, education and other partners will assume within the learning programme?
 - the strategy and the way in which the learning programme relates to the research programme of the learning community are clearly described and appropriate; the impact (including knowledge dissemination and adoption) of the research results on professional practice, the research community and education is realised;
 - the proposed curriculum is clearly described and feasible; the various components are logically interconnected and supported by an appropriate, well-justified budget; there is a clearly described and appropriate risk analysis and, where necessary, a contingency plan;

- 3 Research programme
 - the research programme is carefully formulated and substantiated, reflects the practical question, is appropriate to the theme to which the application relates, and is in line with state-of-the-art knowledge;
 - The research methods and analytical techniques follow a specific methodology and are therefore transparent, reproducible and transferable;
 - To what extent does the activity plan clearly describe the roles that practice, research, education and other partners will assume during the research?
 - the research programme is feasible and implementable. In this regard, the following will be considered:
 - the extent to which the requested funding is proportionate to the nature, scope and expected impact of the project proposal;
 - the level of staffing and quality, as well as the extent of available resources and time commitment;
 - the extent to which there is clearly assigned and qualified project management;

5 Grant obligations

This chapter explains the various grant obligations that – in addition to the grant conditions mentioned in section 3.5 – apply following award.

5.1 Start date

The project start date must be no later than 6 months after the date of the formal award decision. The project has a maximum duration of 4 years.

5.1.1 Substantive monitoring

Content monitoring can take place in various ways.

Programme meetings

Each year, the programme team of the CIIC incentive programme organises an event to which the (sub-)project leader(s) of the successful applications are invited. In order to send these invitations, it may be necessary to share the project leader's email address with the CIIC programme team.

Knowledge-sharing committee

The CIIC programme team at CLICKNL interacts with the projects resulting from this Call for Proposals via a knowledge-sharing committee. In this committee, the projects are represented by the project leaders. The project leaders provide the programme team with relevant information (including knowledge and project results) for the CIIC incentive programme. In addition, knowledge and insights from the various projects are exchanged. In order to send these invitations, it may be necessary to share the project leader's email address with the CIIC programme team.

Reporting obligations

In order to monitor the progress of the project, NWO will request interim substantive and financial reports from the project leader. In view of the reporting obligations under the National Growth Fund, NWO may request reports from the project leader and share (parts of) these reports with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the CIIC programme team/CLICKNL. For these reporting obligations, NWO will issue an additional questionnaire in addition to the regular interim reports.

Project closure

Upon completion of a project, substantive and financial final reports will be requested.

If the main applicant's organisation, as the beneficiary of the NWO grant, is not covered by the OCW audit protocol, it is obliged, as the lead organisation, to provide an auditor's report covering the entire project. The amount of the grant is then determined by NWO.

5.1.2 Data management

Following the award of a grant, the applicant must develop the data management section into a data management plan. Applicants may draw on the advice of the committee in doing so. In the plan, the applicant must describe whether existing data will be used or whether the project involves a new data collection, and how the data collection will be made FAIR: findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable. Before submission, the data management plan must be agreed with a data steward or similar official at the research organisation where the project is being carried out. Approval of the data management plan by NWO is a condition for the award of the grant. The plan may be amended during the course of the research. Further information on NWO's data management protocol can be found at: [Research data management | NWO](#)

5.1.3 Consortium agreement

The NWO Intellectual Property (IP) Policy applies with regard to intellectual property (IP). The NWO IP Policy can be found in Chapter 4 of the NWO Funding Regulations 2024, although Article 4.1.1(4) of the NWO Funding Regulations 2024 does not apply to this Call for Proposals.

Funded activities must be carried out whilst the project participant is employed by the applicant's organisation. If a project participant is employed by multiple employers, care must be taken to ensure that any copyright and IP rights held by these individuals do not hinder the publication of the project results.

Applicants must carry out an NWO-funded project during the period in which they work for the organisation. If an applicant or an NWO-funded researcher is employed by multiple employers, the other employer must, on behalf of the applicant, waive any IP rights arising from the project.

NWO aims to ensure that research results can be applied by the partners involved in the project. NWO aims, on the one hand, to ensure that the research results of projects it funds are publicly accessible, and on the other hand, to stimulate the further development of the research results by offering parties the opportunity to exploit them. In this context, it may be desirable to transfer intellectual property rights or grant a licence to (one of) the private parties involved in the project. The basic principle is that all research results may be published, subject to agreements on publication procedures.

The conclusion of a consortium agreement following the award of the grant is one of the conditions for the start of the project. This agreement sets out arrangements regarding intellectual property and publication, knowledge transfer, confidentiality, co-funding payments, and progress and final reports. Uploading to ISAAC is required before a project can commence.

The responsibility for arranging the consortium agreement lies with the applicant.

The (model) consortium agreement made available by NWO on the funding page for this Call for Proposals may be used for this purpose. This model agreement has been drawn up in accordance with the NWO Funding Scheme 2024.

5.1.4 Socially responsible licensing

The project may yield knowledge suitable for application in society. When entering into agreements regarding the licensing and/or transfer of research results developed under this Call for Proposals, account must be taken of the ten principles for socially responsible licensing, as set out in the UMCNL report "[Socially Responsible Licensing](#)".

5.1.5 Open Access

NWO has signed the Berlin Declaration (2003) and is a member of cOAlitie S (2018), and is committed to making the results of scientific research funded by NWO freely accessible via the internet (Open Access). In doing so, NWO is implementing the Dutch government's policy to make all publicly funded research available via Open Access. Scientific publications of research funded on the basis of awards resulting from this Call for proposals must therefore be made available via Open Access in accordance with the Open Access Policy.

Scientific articles

Scientific articles must be made available via Open Access immediately upon publication (without an embargo) via one of the following routes:

- publication in a fully open access journal or platform listed in the DOAJ;
- publication in a subscription journal and the deposit of at least the author's version of the article in an Open Access repository listed in OpenDOAR;
- publication in a journal for which a transformative Open Access agreement is in place between UNL and a publisher. See: [Open Access |](#).

Books

Different conditions apply to books, book chapters and collections. See the Open Access Policy on [Open Science | NWO](#).

CC BY licence

To ensure the widest possible dissemination of publications, at least a Creative Commons (CC BY) licence must be applied. Where there are compelling reasons, the author may request to publish under a CC BY-ND licence. For books, collections and book chapters, the choice of a CC BY licence is optional.

Costs

Any costs for publishing in fully Open Access journals can be included in the project budget using the 'equipment' budget module. Costs for publications in hybrid journals are not eligible for reimbursement by NWO. For Open Access books, the separate NWO Open Access book fund may be utilised.

For further details on NWO's Open Access policy, see: [Open Science | NWO](#).

6 Contact and further information

6.1 Contact

6.1.1 Questions regarding content

For questions regarding the content of this Call for Proposals, please contact: CIIC-LC@NWO.NL

6.1.2 Technical queries regarding the electronic application system ISAAC

If you have any technical questions regarding the use of ISAAC, please contact the ISAAC helpdesk. Please consult the manual first before contacting the helpdesk for advice. The ISAAC helpdesk is available Monday to Friday from 10.00 to 17.00 on +31 (0) 70 34 40 600. You can also send your question by email to toisaac.helpdesk@nwo.nl. You will receive a reply within two working days.

6.2 Further information

NWO processes personal data received in the context of this round in accordance with the NWO privacy statement, [Privacy Statement | NWO](#).

NWO may contact applicants to request an evaluation of the procedure and/or the research programme.

View [the round and all documents in ISAAC](#).

7 Annexes

7.1 Budget modules and rates for research activities carried out by research organisations

For personnel making a substantial contribution to the research, funding for salary costs may be requested. Funding for these salary costs depends on the type of appointment and the research organisation where the personnel are/will be employed.

- For university institutions, salary costs are funded in accordance with:
 - the UNL salary scales in force at the time the grant is awarded + a 50% surcharge ([Salary scales | NWO](#)), or
 - the rates in accordance with the integrated cost system (IKS) as filed with RVO for the relevant principal or co-applicants. See also section 7.3.
- For university medical centres, salary costs are funded in accordance with:
 - the UMCNL salary scales applicable at the time the grant is awarded + 50% surcharge ([Salary scales | NWO](#)), or
 - the rates in accordance with the integrated cost system (IKS) as filed with RVO for the relevant principal or co-applicants. See also section 7.3.
- For personnel at universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes and other research organisations, salary costs are funded on the basis of:
 - the collective agreement pay scale for the relevant employee in accordance with the rates applicable at the time of grant award from Table 2.1 ‘Average direct wage costs’, column ‘Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT’ of the Government Rates Manual + 50% surcharge ([Salary Tables | NWO](#)), or
 - the rates in accordance with the integrated cost system (IKS) as filed with RVO for the relevant main or co-applicants. See also section 7.3.
- For the Dutch Caribbean, the central government in the Caribbean Netherlands employs civil servants on the BES islands under different conditions than in the European Netherlands.
<https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/werken-bij-rijksdienst-caribisch-nederland/arbeidsvoorwaarden>.

ALL applicants (research organisations, businesses, civil society organisations) MUST make a reservation (see section 7.4).

The rates for all budget modules, with the exception of the IKS rates (see section 7.5), are included in the budget template attached to the application form. For the ‘Postdoc’ budget module, a one-off, person-specific bench fee of €5,000 is added to the salary costs (not applicable when using IKS), to stimulate the scientific career of the NWO-funded project personnel member. Except when using IKS rates. The IKS rates are already inclusive, so the bench fee is included in these. Allowances for PhD students/scholarship holders at a Dutch university are not eligible for NWO funding. Below is an explanation of the available budget modules.

7.1.1 Personnel

For the salary scales and rates mentioned: see [Salary scales | NWO](#).

Postdoctoral researcher

A postdoc is appointed at a university in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a university medical centre (UMC) or a research organisation as referred to in paragraph 3.1.

Use the rates for a senior research assistant in the UNL salary tables plus a 50% allowance, and the rates for a postdoc at a university medical centre (UMC) in the UMCNL salary tables plus a 50% allowance, or the IKS rates as filed with RVO.

It is not possible to apply for funding for a postdoc who started the project to be funded by before the start of the grant.

Only a postdoc position with an appointment of at least 12 months at 0.5 FTE qualifies as an appointment for which a one-off, person-specific bench fee of €5,000 is available (not applicable when using IKS) to stimulate the postdoc's academic career.

Non-academic staff (NWP)

Funding may be requested for non-research staff (NWP) required for the implementation of the project. This may include, for example, programmers, technical assistants, analysts or project managers. The deployment of NWP must be described in the application.

The duration of the appointment shall not exceed the duration of the NWO-funded project.

Depending on the job level, choose from the UNL or UMCNL salary scales plus a 50% allowance for NWP-MBO, NWP-HBO and NWP-academic, or use the IKS rates as filed with RVO. No personal bench fee is available for NWP.

Replacement of the applicant

This budget module allows funding to be requested for the costs of replacing the principal and/or co-applicant(s). This enables the employer of the applicant in question to cover the costs of exempting him/her from teaching, supervision, administrative or management duties (not research duties). The time freed up by the replacement may only be used by the applicant(s) for work within the scope of the project. The application must describe which activities within the scope of the project the applicant(s) will carry out during the time they are released from their duties.

A maximum of the equivalent of 5 full-time months of replacement may be requested.

NWO funds the replacement on the basis of the salary scales applicable on the decision date + a 50% allowance for a senior research assistant (scale 11.0) or on the basis of the IKS rate as filed with RVO, up to a maximum of the rate used in the application budget. ([Salary scales | NWO](#))

Personnel at universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes and other research organisations

Funding may be requested for personnel at universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes and other (research) organisations. The rates are determined on the basis of the Government Rates Manual (HOT), Table 2 under 2.1, 'average total wage costs per salary scale', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT' plus a 50% surcharge. The pay scale for the position applied for determines the rate from the HOT table. Alternatively, use the IKS rates as filed with RVO. No person-specific benchmark fee is available for personnel at universities of applied sciences, TO2 institutes and other (research) organisations.

For organisations that do not use the Central Government Collective Labour Agreement or a comparable agreement (such as the collective labour agreements for higher professional education, senior secondary vocational education, secondary education and local authorities), the rate that most closely approximates the actual wage costs must be used.

Students

Students may be employed in the research. If the students contribute as part of their curriculum, the rate applicable is the standard internship allowance of the university or university of applied sciences.

If students contribute as student assistants in a part-time role alongside their studies, the rate applies in accordance with the Government Rates Manual (HOT), Table 2 under 2.1 'average total wage costs per pay scale', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excluding VAT', scale 1 plus a 50% surcharge. Or use the IKS rates as filed with RVO.

Academic personnel at a research organisation abroad

Funding may be requested for the salary costs of personnel at a foreign research organisation that contributes to the project. The foreign research organisation must meet the definition of a research organisation as set out in Article 1.1, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the NWO Funding Scheme 2024 and the cumulative conditions listed under 'conditions for foreign research organisations'.

Provide convincing evidence of how the researcher from the foreign research organisation contributes specific expertise to the project that is not available in the Netherlands at the level required for the project. The assessment committee will evaluate this substantiation as part of the 'quality of the consortium' criterion. This substantiation is not required if NWO has concluded a bilateral agreement regarding '*Money follows cooperation*' with the national research funding body of the country in which the foreign research organisation is located. [The NWO website](#) lists the research funding bodies with which NWO has concluded such an agreement. NWO does not award grants to co-applicants abroad who are subject to applicable sanctions legislation.

The main applicant receives the grant and is responsible for transferring grant funds to the co-applicant's foreign research organisation and for providing financial accountability for the expenditure of the foreign portion of the grant. The exchange rate risk lies with the applicant. Gains or losses arising from exchange rates are not eligible for funding.

Use the UNL rates adjusted for the [country correction coefficients](#). These rates are maximum amounts. No person-related bench fee is available.

If more than €125,000 per organisation is requested within this budget module, an audit report is required with the final financial statement.

7.1.2 Equipment

Funding may be requested for all project-specific costs relating to, among other things, consumables, the procurement of services, materials, small instruments, access to national and international facilities, software and research equipment that no longer has any economic value after use. Travel and accommodation costs (domestic and international) for all persons working on the project, including visiting researchers from abroad, costs for organising (international) workshops and symposia, costs for data management, publications, and costs relating to [Citizen Science](#) are also covered by this module. A maximum of 50% of the material budget requested from NWO may be used for work carried out by third parties (e.g. laboratory analyses, data collection, etc.).

Travel costs (domestic and international) will only be reimbursed on the basis of 2nd class/economy class fares. For publications, the provisions in section 5.1.5 Open access apply. Costs for an audit report may only be claimed for institutions not subject to the OCW's education auditors' protocol, up to a maximum of €5,000 per audit report.

It is not permitted to claim costs for:

- organisational infrastructure and overheads, including a fully functional workplace, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, commuting expenses, training, facilities, HR consultancy and corporate welfare, documentary information provision and home working allowance;
- the use and maintenance of scientific infrastructure developed in-house;
- regular teaching activities;

Please note: If funding is requested for the above project-specific costs of foreign organisations, these organisations must be assessed prior to submission in the manner described in section 7.1.1 '*Research personnel at a research organisation abroad*'.

7.1.3 Investments

Funding may be requested for all project-specific resources for the purpose of research or costs relating to the construction or further development of scientific infrastructure that retain economic value after completion of the project, or can be reused. Upon completion of the project, the beneficiary acquires ownership of these research resources. If the beneficiary realises a profit from the economic ownership of these research resources, such profits must be invested in research activities. This concerns the purchase of equipment with residual value for the conduct of research and investments in the construction or (further) development of scientific infrastructure. Labour costs as part of the investment may be claimed as personnel costs.

The costs of investments must be adequately specified and justified in the application.

The following are eligible:

- costs for investments in scientific equipment;
- costs for investments in datasets;
- wage costs for personnel with essential technical expertise required for the development or construction of an investment.

The following are not eligible for funding:

- costs for infrastructure facilities that can be regarded as standard infrastructure (fully functional workstations, accommodation, office automation, personnel administration, commuting expenses, training, facilities management, HR consultancy and occupational health and safety, provision of documentary information, and home working allowance);
- data collections and any associated software and bibliographies that are already available by other means;
- other personnel costs, including personnel costs for the operation and conduct of research using the facility;
- costs for the maintenance and use of equipment on a project. The costs for the use of equipment on a project may be claimed via the equipment budget.

7.1.4 Knowledge utilisation

The requested budget must be adequately specified in the application. Use the provisions under Personnel (7.1.1) and Equipment (7.1.2) to determine the rates.

This Call for Proposals calls for applied research, in which knowledge utilisation through impact via demand articulation and collaboration within a consortium is already partially integrated into the project activities. The applicant must clearly indicate what this impact consists of and how the knowledge intended to be developed will be utilised and contribute to the impact objectives.

The budget requested for knowledge utilisation must be adequately specified in the application.

Please note: If funding is requested for the above project-specific costs of foreign organisations, these organisations must be assessed prior to submission in the manner described in section 7.1.1 *'Research personnel at a research organisation abroad'*.

7.1.5 Project management

The Project Management module allows applicants to request a project management budget of up to 5% of the total budget applied for from NWO. This budget may only cover activities that are purely supportive of the project for which funding is being sought. The applicant must provide adequate justification for this budget.

Project management is understood to include, amongst other things, the optimal design of the consortium's organisational structure, support for the consortium and the principal applicant, monitoring the coherence, progress and unity of the project, and coordination between the sub-projects within the project. These tasks may also be carried out by external organisations insofar as they are not available within the research organisation of the main applicant and/or co-applicants. When selecting a third party through the tendering procedure, research organisations must take into account the government's procurement rules and, where necessary, follow a European tendering procedure. The work carried out by the main applicant and co-applicants themselves in the context of the project (management) may not be funded from this budget module.

The budget to be requested for project management may consist of material or implementation costs and personnel costs. For personnel costs, a maximum rate of €121 per hour may be claimed. The hourly rate for the personnel to be appointed must be based on a cost-covering rate and is calculated on the basis of the organisation's standard number of productive hours. The cost-covering rate comprises:

- (average) gross salary corresponding to the role of the employee who will contribute to the project (based on the relevant employee's collective agreement pay scale)
- holiday pay and 13th month's salary (if applicable under the applicable collective agreement) in proportion to the FTE deployment
- social security contributions
- pension contributions
- overheads

It is permitted to have project management tasks carried out by external organisations, but the portion of (commercial) hourly rates that exceeds the aforementioned rates is not eligible for funding and therefore cannot be included in the budget.

7.2 Eligible costs for businesses and civil society organisations and for research activities carried out by research organisations

7.2.1 Eligible costs for personnel

Costs for the funding of personnel employed by a business or civil society organisation are reimbursed up to a maximum of 40% in accordance with:

1. the HOT rates applicable at the time the grant is awarded, as set out in Table 2.1 'Average direct labour costs', column 'Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT' of the Government Rates Manual + 50% surcharge ([Salary Tables | NWO](#)). The employee's actual hourly rate based on their organisation's collective labour agreement serves as the basis for determining the rate. For organisations that do not use the Central Government collective labour agreement or a comparable one (such as the collective labour agreements for higher professional education, senior secondary vocational education, secondary education and local authorities) and/or companies and other social organisations not covered by a collective labour agreement, the HOT rate that most closely approximates the actual wage costs may be used. The calculation must be based on the number of productive hours specified in the current edition of the Government Rates Manual, or
2. a fixed hourly rate of €60, or
3. a rate in accordance with the comprehensive cost system as filed with RVO for the relevant co-applicant. See also section 7.4.

These may be personnel costs for researchers, technicians and other support personnel insofar as they are involved in the research project.

Under Article 25 of the GBER, NWO reimburses a maximum of 40% of the eligible personnel costs. For this reason, if HOT rates rise after the application has been submitted and before the application is awarded, an applicant who uses the HOT rates in the application budget must set aside funds to finance the increase in personnel rates on a one-off basis. To this end, NWO will specify a percentage in the budget format based on an estimate of historical, multi-year figures. The applicant cannot derive any rights from the prescribed percentage with regard to the actual increase in rates.

If the reserve proves insufficient to finance the increase in personnel rates, the applicant shall offset the increase from other budget items, whereby no substantial substantive changes to the application are permitted.

If it transpires that not all the reserved funds are required, NWO will adjust the application budget downwards and only the costs associated with the actual increase will be allocated.

7.2.2 Eligible costs (other than personnel costs)

Insofar as the eligible costs of research and development projects relate to costs other than personnel costs, the following costs are eligible for funding under this Call for proposals:

- Costs of equipment and apparatus: costs of equipment and apparatus insofar as and for as long as they are used for the project. Where such equipment and apparatus are not used for the project throughout their entire useful life, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the duration of the project, calculated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, shall be considered eligible costs. Up to 25% of the eligible costs per applicant organisation;
- Contract research costs: costs of contract research, knowledge and patents purchased on an arm's length basis from, or licensed by, external sources, as well as costs for consultancy and equivalent services used exclusively for the project. Maximum 25% of eligible costs per applicant organisation;
- Operational costs: additional overheads and other operational expenditure, including costs for materials, supplies and similar products, arising directly from the project. Maximum 25% of the eligible costs per applicant organisation.

A maximum of 40% of the eligible costs is granted as a subsidy. The remaining minimum of 60% of the eligible costs constitutes the organisation's own contribution and is included in the '**Funding other than by NWO**' (see also section 3.2).

7.3 Eligible costs for the establishment and operation of the innovation cluster/learning community

Investment Costs Module

Under this module, funding may be requested for the costs of investments in tangible and intangible assets relating to the construction and upgrading of the learning community.

Tangible assets include land, buildings and installations, machinery and equipment, apparatus, software and data collections. Intangible assets include physical and/or financially intangible assets, such as patents, licences, know-how or other intellectual property rights.

In addition, under this module, personnel costs may be claimed for the funding of personnel who contribute to the construction or upgrading of the learning community. The costs for investments must be adequately specified and justified in the application.

Costs that cannot be claimed include maintenance and insurance costs.

Operating Costs Module

Under this module, personnel costs and administrative costs may be claimed for the operation of the learning community.

The personnel and administrative costs for the operation of the learning community relate to:

- a. managing a cluster to promote collaboration, information sharing and the provision of specialised and tailor-made business support services;
- b. marketing the cluster to attract new businesses or organisations and increase visibility; and
- c. the management of the cluster's facilities, and the organisation of training programmes, workshops and conferences to support knowledge sharing, networking and transnational cooperation.

Personnel costs for research activities cannot be subsidised under this module. These costs must be budgeted under the budget modules for personnel costs in Tables 2 and 3, section 3.2.

To fund personnel costs for the learning community, one of the following rate systems must be used for both modules:

- UNL salary scales + 50% surcharge (see section 7.1);
- UMCNL salary scales + 50% surcharge (see section 7.1);
- rates from Table 2.1 ‘Average direct labour costs’, column ‘Hourly rate for productive hours, excl. VAT’ of the Government Rates Manual + 50% surcharge (see paragraph 7.2);
- integrated cost system (IKS) as filed⁸ with RVO for the organisation in question (see section 7.5)⁹ ;
- fixed hourly rate of €60 (see section 7.5).

When applying for funding for personnel costs, justification must be provided as to why these personnel costs are necessary.

Under Article 27 of the GBER, NWO reimburses up to 50% of the eligible costs for the establishment and operation of a learning community. If, after submission of the application and prior to its approval, the UNL, and/or UMCNL, and/or HOT rates increase, the applicant must set aside funds in the application budget to finance the increase in personnel rates on a one-off basis. To this end, NWO will specify a percentage in the budget format based on an estimate of historical, multi-year figures. The applicant cannot derive any rights from the prescribed percentage with regard to the actual increase in rates.

If the reserve proves insufficient to finance the increase in personnel rates, the applicant shall offset the increase from other budget items, whereby no substantial substantive changes to the application are permitted.

If it transpires that not all the reserved funds are required, NWO will adjust the application budget downwards and only the costs associated with the actual increase will be allocated.

7.4 The integral cost system (IKS) and the fixed hourly rate

Specifically and exclusively for Calls for proposals conducted by NWO under the National Growth Fund, principal and co-applicants may use the Integrated Cost System as applied by RVO for the funding of personnel costs.

Only research organisations, companies and civil society organisations whose IKS rates have been filed with and approved by RVO may apply these rates in the application budget.

If an applicant wishes to use the IKS rates, this choice automatically implies that they authorise NWO to request the IKS rates from RVO for the purposes of NWO’s formal assessment of submission criteria. This choice also implies that the IKS rates will be shared with the proposal’s consortium partners when a joint budget is drawn up.

As part of the formal assessment of submission requirements, NWO will compare the IKS rates in the application budget with those filed with and approved by RVO. In doing so, NWO will use the most recently filed rates at the time of submission. If a discrepancy is found between the IKS rates in the application budget and the IKS rates on file with RVO, NWO’s will contact the main applicant, who is responsible for bringing the application (including the budget) into line with the conditions within the specified timeframe (see also section 4.2, subsection ‘processing the application’).

The positions listed in the application budget must correspond to the positions specified in the IKS table as filed with RVO. The associated hourly rates must also be listed in the application budget without indexation. There is no possibility of indexing rates during the project period. If IKS rates have been used, the bench fee does not apply because these integral costs are already included in the IKS rate.

⁸ NWO adopts the RVO terminology: ‘filed’ also implies that the rates have been approved by RVO.

⁹ If an applicant wishes to use the IKS rates, this choice automatically implies that they authorise NWO to request the IKS rates from RVO and to share them with the consortium partners of the application at the time a joint budget is drawn up.

In the final financial statement, the applicant must list the personnel costs incurred for each year separately.

Fixed hourly rate

(Source: [Fixed hourly rate system \(rvo.nl\)](#)) The fixed hourly rate system is a standard method for calculating the amount of grant for eligible costs. Research organisations cannot use this rate.

The fixed hourly rate is a reimbursement for your organisation's wage/labour costs and indirect or overhead costs, such as accommodation costs, costs of office equipment and costs of domestic travel for work-related meetings. The fixed hourly rate in this Call for Proposals is €60.

If you use this system, your records must clearly show the number of hours worked by your project personnel and the costs of equipment, materials and third parties (invoices). A breakdown of the actual labour costs of the personnel working on the project is not required.

7.5 Reservation of UNL, UMCNL and HOT labour costs

If, after submission of the proposal and before the proposal is awarded, the UNL and/or UMCNL and/or HOT rates increase, the applicant must set aside funds in the proposal's budget to finance a one-off increase in personnel rates. NWO will specify a percentage in the budget format based on an estimate of historical multi-year figures. The applicant cannot derive any rights from the specified percentage with regard to the actual rate increase.

If the amount set aside proves insufficient to finance the increase in personnel rates, the applicant must offset the increase from other budget categories. Substantive changes to the application are not permitted. If it transpires that not all the reserved funds are required, NWO will adjust the application budget downwards and only the costs associated with the actual rate increase will be reimbursed.

7.6 Relationship of this Call for Proposals to the other components of NGF-CIIC

Further information on the governance of the CIIC incentive programme and the relationship between this Call for Proposals and the other action lines and activities forming part of this NGF project is available at www.ciic.nl.

7.6.1 CIIC Innovation Agenda

NWO advises applicants to familiarise themselves with the CIIC Innovation Agenda and, where possible, to in the implementation of the project. The Innovation Agenda is available via the [funding page](#) for this scheme.

7.6.2 Guideline and Self-Assessment on Public Values for Immersive Experiences

NWO advises applicants to familiarise themselves with the Public Values Guideline and Self-Assessment for Immersive Experiences (IX) and to incorporate them into the project's implementation where possible.

These

Public Values guideline and self-assessment is available via the [funding page](#) for this scheme.

More detailed background information on Public Values can be found on the CIIC website.

7.7 Other annexes

7.7.1 CIIC Human Capital Programme

Why the focus on human capital at CIIC?

The desired acceleration and leap in scale for IX is certainly not just a matter of new technology, innovation and the market. Without people, there can be no innovation, application or renewal. The development, use and acceptance of IX require people to know and understand what it entails, how it works and what it can do, to see opportunities and possibilities, and to remain critical with regard to safeguarding social and public values. This calls for a broad range of (new) talent, from developers and creators with extensive knowledge and experience of technology, IX, AI and design, to practitioners in fields such as healthcare and safety, who recognise the opportunities of IX in their sector and can translate and convey them to the professionals who will then put them into practice. And all the links in between throughout the entire chain. And it requires all kinds of talent, from practical to scientific, from technical to social, from design to communication.

The overarching objective of CIIC's human capital approach is to ensure a timely supply of sufficient and well-trained professionals in the IX domain, in crucial roles and disciplines throughout the entire chain and in the priority application domains.

Human capital for IX encompasses the following elements:

- the supply of young talent from relevant feeder programmes and the provision of jobs and career paths in IX
- educating and training professionals who are already working in IX and who wish to or need to develop further
- educating and training professionals working in application areas where IX will increasingly be used and who are required to have a 'basic' level of understanding and knowledge (also as part of IX's catalytic role: early adopters)
- educating and training professionals working in the other links of the IX chain (see section 3.4)
- educating and training lateral entrants who, coming from another sector, are active (or wish to become active) in the field of IX
- Enabling Dutch talent to gain experience in the international ecosystem, utilising the strong international position of the Dutch IX sector for international cooperation, and positioning the Netherlands attractively for international IX talent.
- educating and training teachers and trainers in fields relevant to IX at public and private institutions and companies

The value chain for IX knowledge domains and professions

IX is a young field. There is little to no specific labour market research. Furthermore, the various components of the IX field have not (yet) been clearly defined. In order to develop effective interventions for human capital, it is important to have a clear picture of the relevant knowledge areas, and of the types of companies and professions involved. Which knowledge and skills are in demand, and which will become important in the future? To be able to 'substantially develop' the human capital approach, it is important to establish a certain structure here. This has resulted in an initial overview.

In the first phase of the approach, a value chain has therefore been formulated on the basis of interviews and documents, drawing heavily on the classification used across the entire creative industry (not exhaustive):

- IX creators with sub-domains such as Creative Design, User Experience (UX), Graphics, Game Development, Social Interaction, Creative Storytelling, etc.
- The areas of application for IX:
 - Media and Entertainment, with sub-domains such as Media, Festivals and Cinemas.
 - Arts & Culture with sub-domains such as Cinemas, Theatres and Cultural Heritage
 - Creative Business Services with sub-domains such as Public Order and Safety, Education & Training, Care & Welfare, Built Environment, Industry.
- Distributors, including the various platforms.
- Creative and business connectors between IX and the application domains.

The building blocks of the CIIC human capital approach

To achieve its objective of ensuring a sufficient number of well-trained professionals in the IX domain, CIIC works with the following building blocks:

- 1 Powerful Learning Communities (6–12 in the first phase) which, through public-private partnerships between knowledge institutions and businesses/civil society organisations, lay the sustainable foundation (ecosystem) for training and innovation in IX.
- 2 Market-oriented skills and competence development, focusing on fostering specific skills and expertise among creators and professionals in application areas. This involves developing training modules (approx. 15 in the first phase and ultimately 30 new modules by the end of the programme).
- 3 Actually training professionals in new knowledge and developments in the IX domain across the entire value chain (3,000 in the first phase and ultimately 10,000 trained professionals by the end of the programme).
- 4 Promoting the influx of talent (young talent, professionals from other sectors and fields of expertise, and international mobility).
- 5 Systematic professionalisation of the labour market for IX, working towards a single hub for accessing knowledge, systematically building up knowledge about the labour market (monitor) and establishing a set of agreements on how modular education can be organised (a skills-based labour market based on a widely accepted skills framework). We envisage research and monitoring reports similar to the National Games Monitor 2024, the Creative Industries Monitor and the recently published 'Creative Industries Employers' Perspectives on Skills Initiatives 2025'.
- 6 Continuous focus on the link between the human capital approach and the other pillars of CIIC, such as facilities and ecosystems, knowledge and methods, innovation and demos, and the safeguarding of public values (see 3.6).

Synergy between the Human Capital Action Lines and the entire CIIC programme

Synergy within the human capital activities:

- At present, the other building blocks of CIIC's human capital approach are still being developed, such as the Development Programme for Market-Oriented Education and Training Modules and the Incentive Scheme for the Education and Training of IX Professionals.
- Based on the above information, applicants in the call for Learning Communities are asked to indicate as clearly as possible how they intend to link their proposals to the other building blocks of the human capital approach, for example with regard to market-oriented education and training modules, the training incentive ('vouchers') or the promotion of lateral entry and the education and training of professionals.

Synergy with other programme activities within CIIC:

- The strength of CIIC lies in the synergy between all sub-activities (see building block 6). For instance, ecosystem development is taking place in many areas, work is being done on methodology development, there is a focus on innovation, and attention is paid to ethics and public values. This requires strong 'central' coordination, vision and alignment from the CIIC programme.
- There must also be necessary synergy between human capital and 'ecosystem and facilities (facility sharing)' and 'innovation and demonstration projects' (training professionals in these projects). It is therefore entirely conceivable to establish Learning Communities based on the initiatives and ecosystems set up within this framework.
- It is also necessary to establish a strong link with the methodology development component of the CIIC programme (within programme line 5 of CIIC).

Synergy with other (NGF) programmes:

- Other NGF programmes are also active with Learning Communities in related fields, such as DUTCH (training for hospitals) and AIC4NL (focused on AI). These target similar audiences with comparable content. Applicants are, of course, asked to seek coherence with these programmes if the application gives cause to do so.
- Other NGF programmes such as NPULS and LLO-katalysator focus strongly on professionalising the public training infrastructure for Lifelong Development (including microcredentials, individual career paths, etc.).

Key principles for human capital activities

1. Space for creative professionals:
 - Creative professionals and businesses are central to the human capital approach: they are the ones realising the IX ambition for the future. The creative sector consists of many small businesses, and this is particularly true for the IX domain.
 - Furthermore, the earning capacity of these small businesses is limited, which means there is little scope for significant investment or contributions of their own.
 - In developing the human capital approach, this starting point determines the preconditions that will be set for its implementation.
2. Dynamic ‘hands-on’ approach:
 - This involves both increasing the number of people available for the IX labour market (quantitative) and educating and training professionals already in work in new knowledge and skills (qualitative).
 - Developments in the IX field are rapid: it is a young field in which knowledge quickly becomes outdated. This makes it difficult to provide exact figures and a precise definition of the areas of focus. There is virtually no suitable labour market information available.
 - That is why we have opted for an approach that emphasises: ‘getting started’, launching initiatives, demonstrating that they work, generating momentum, making adjustments along the way, initiating new initiatives where necessary, and discontinuing those that prove ineffective in practice. This approach fits the dynamic world of IX and the profile of the people working within it. Only then can we be successful.
 - In parallel with this, we are working on further professionalising the human capital approach with a labour market monitor, a dynamic knowledge platform serving as a single hub where information and products are made accessible, and a ‘skills framework’ that clarifies which occupations and skills are relevant in the IX world.
3. Providing a foundation and keeping pace with developments:
 - It has already been stated that the human capital programme aims to keep pace with market developments whilst simultaneously laying a solid, sustainable human capital foundation for IX.
 - This means that the programme aims to respond to trends and new developments, but will not react like a ‘speedboat’ to numerous changing priorities and insights. It lays a sustainable foundation for IX in the belief that basic knowledge and skills can be identified and that it is important to invest in a sustainable and responsive infrastructure capable of reacting flexibly to new developments.
 - This applies equally to the quantitative objective. Economic developments are – certainly in these times – erratic and unpredictable. The growth trajectory may at times be slightly less steep than anticipated; nevertheless, the programme operates in the firm belief that IX and its applications have a promising future and that whilst the pace of upscaling may vary, the long-term outlook does not.
 - Finally, it is often the case that the (basic) skills for IX are also relevant in other domains such as digitalisation and AI. In practice, it will become apparent (as in many other innovation programmes) that the ‘human capital component of the programme will train people for a broader range of domains, thereby limiting sensitivity to economic cycles.
4. Building on what already works:
 - We are not starting from scratch. There are already many strong ecosystems for IX:
 - Such as OASIS, the Centre of Expertise Creative Innovation in Amsterdam, BUAS in Breda, HKU in Utrecht and Artez in Arnhem, and the SHINE network in Rotterdam.
 - Private ecosystems centred around, for example, the EYE Film Museum, the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, and the Nieuwe Instituut.
 - Market-oriented initiatives with the potential to develop into training models.
 - Furthermore, on behalf of CIIC, an inventory will be carried out of purely private initiatives that can be identified, for example, through sectors (such as BNO) and festivals.
5. International
 - IX is a highly international market, in which new technologies and applications are developed worldwide and require rapid implementation and integration.

- The Netherlands holds a leading position internationally, thanks to its high-calibre expertise and industry, as well as its strong international focus.
- That is why CIIC aims to build on this by positioning Dutch talent internationally, by fostering international partnerships and by ensuring that national IX expertise yields international benefits.
- And by encouraging the influx of international talent attracted by the (to be realised) excellent conditions for training and IX, and the high-quality IX communities and companies that are (or will be) active here with an international reputation.

Further information on the entire CIIC Human Capital Programme is available at <https://www.ciiic.nl/human-capital>

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