ECHOES Cascading Grants Programme Guide for Applicants

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1. General Information

The ECHOES Cascading Grants Programme

The ECHOES Cascading Grants Programme provides funding for consortia led by Cultural Heritage Institutions (CHIs) to engage with the Cultural Heritage Cloud. The programme supports up to 50 projects across three calls to enhance digital engagement, data sharing, and collaboration.

Who can apply for funding

- Any Cultural Heritage Institution (CHI) located in an eligible country under **Horizon Europe** (EU Member States and associated countries) can act as coordinator. Either alone or as lead partner of a consortium.

- Submissions by consortia and especially by interdisciplinary consortia (that include CHIs, researcher, small and medium-sized enterprises, civil society actors, etc.) are encouraged. All partners in the consortium receiving funding should be located in an eligible country under Horizon Europe.

- Smaller and medium-sized or lesser resourced CHIs are especially encouraged to apply.

Key focus areas of the three calls

- **Call 1: Data** – Projects that contribute heritage data to the Cultural Heritage Cloud and would like to make use of its tools and infrastructure.

- **Call 2: Engagement and Collaboration** – Initiatives that promote digital skills, awareness, and collaboration with CHIs. Projects that strategically enlist professional umbrella organisations to promote the benefits of the cloud at the sector level to the different CH communities would be particularly welcomed.

- **Call 3: Data and Vertical Applications** – Projects that contribute new datasets to the Cultural Heritage Cloud or develop applications that integrate with enhance its functionalities.

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Objectives of Call 1: Data

This call aims to stimulate various stakeholders within the broader Cultural Heritage Community to contribute data to be used for different aspects of the Cultural Heritage Cloud.

The proposal should **outline the use scenario for the dataset**: which community (or communities) will use this dataset? What will they use it for? (e.g. to facilitate academic research, enhance educational materials, enable virtual exhibitions etc.) What is the expected outcome at the end of the project? How will the results of the project benefit the wider Cultural Heritage community? To this end, various steps may need to be required to contribute this data to the Cultural Heritage Cloud, however making the data Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable (**FAIR**) for a concrete use case, is the most important principle.

Secondly, proposers are asked to provide a **scenario of how the project would like to make use of the Cultural Heritage Cloud**. This should include a list of the possible steps needed to analyse and process the Cultural Heritage dataset. These steps will be guided by the interoperability guidelines and integration strategy of ECHOES, as **published online**.

Finally, proposers should describe the **cultural heritage dataset in detail**. In principle, any type of digital cultural heritage data can be submitted. However, it is crucial to make clear what is the data used as input for the project and what is delivered as output of the project. This may be new derived data, or the same data available with improved metadata through a more accessible repository.

Various dimensions need to be considered when describing the dataset including:

- **Content** (e.g. archaeological finds, archival documents, manuscripts, newspapers, monuments, music, web archives, analytical data, social media data etc.) including details about time period, geographical coverage and subject matter etc. Any ethical considerations related to the dataset (see, e.g. **CARE Principles**) should be described.
- **Technical details** including but not necessarily limited to:
  - ‣ data type (e.g. digitised, born-digital heritage, intangible heritage),
  - ‣ size (e.g. estimated number of files / objects per dataset),
  - ‣ volume (e.g. in MB or GB), file formats (e.g. jpeg, tiff, xml, warc, svg, text etc.),

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- metadata formats to describe the data, including availability and quality of metadata,

- vocabulary (-ies), ontology (-ies) or schemas used in producing the data descriptions,

- possibility of the dataset to be used for training AI models, e.g., availability of labels.

- **Availability and licensing**: availability of the data (in a repository, through an API, metadata via OAI-PMH, etc.) and licensing and IPR issues, the licence (e.g. https://rightsstatements.org/) under which data is made available, etc.

Section 4 below "**Proposal Structure for Call 1**" outlines in more detail what information is expected.

Timeline of the Call 1

- Public call announcement: 28 February 2025

- Online submission portal open for submissions: April 2025

- Stage 1 deadline for proposals: 15 May 2025 at 23:59 CEST

- External evaluation of Stage 1 proposals: July 2025

- Stage 2 deadline for full proposals: September 2025

- Communication of results to applicants: Until mid-October 2025

- Indicative project starting date: December 2025 / January 2026

2. Eligibility Criteria

To be considered for funding, applicants must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- The **coordinator must be a CHI**. In this context, we define CHIs as mission-driven organisations dedicated to the preservation, management, research, and dissemination of cultural heritage, ensuring its accessibility for present and future generations. Any type of CHI (e.g., museums, libraries, archives, or other public institutions dedicated to cultural heritage conservation, preservation and outreach) may apply.

- The coordinator must be located in an **eligible country**, including all EU Member States and associated countries under Horizon Europe. See the **Horizon Europe country profiles** for a list.

- The coordinator must be a **public or private legal entity**, with this status specified on a legal entity form.

- The proposal must be submitted in **English**. Application forms provided by ECHOES must be completed in full, with all of the required information provided in the appropriate sections of the online template.

- The proposal must be submitted to the proposal platform **before the specified deadline for** the Call to which the applicant is applying.

- In each of the three ECHOES calls: organisations can **coordinate one project proposal** and **participate in up to two additional project proposals**. Organisations can receive an accumulated total of 60k € maximum funding across all three calls.

- Larger organisations that are made up of individual centres, institutes or labs, are **not considered as a single entity** for this call. The individual centres, institutes or labs are entitled to apply as independent from the larger organisation.

- Organisations involved in ECHOES can join and prepare proposals, but not the individual centres, institutes or labs and people from these organisations that are actively involved in the ECHOES project. In the proposal, organisations need to express their relation to the ECHOES consortium in detail. An independent evaluator assigned by the ECHOES Consortium will assess if there is a potential conflict of interest.

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3. Application Process

Applying for funding

The evaluation unfolds in two stages (see Figure 1). Applications must be submitted via an online form, accessible via: **https://www.echoes-eccch.eu/cascading-grants/**.
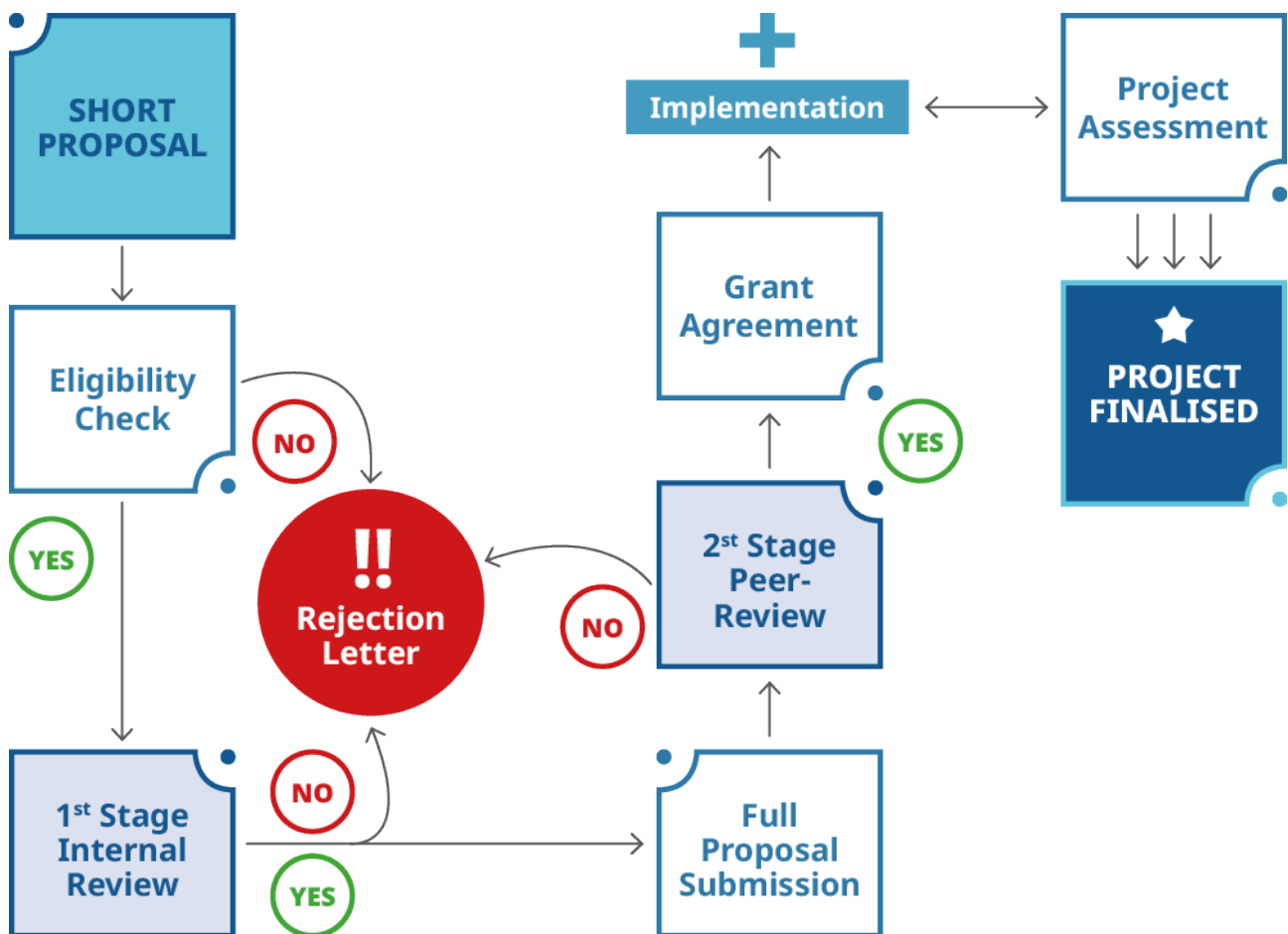

Figure 1. Stages of applying for an ECHOES grant

STAGE 1: Eligibility and relevance to the call

Applicants are required to submit:

- A **concept note** explaining the project's objectives, proposed dataset and methodology, anticipated impact, and alignment with Cultural Heritage Cloud, team composition and expertise.

- **Administrative details** to assess the eligibility of each participant.

- The **budget** overview.

During this stage, applications will be reviewed for eligibility and relevance to the call. Proposals will be assessed based on their alignment with the respective funding call, sustainability considerations, and potential long-term impact. In the first call, twenty-four successful applicants from Stage 1 will be invited to submit a full proposal in Stage 2.

STAGE 2: Full Proposal Submission

Applicants advancing to Stage 2 will need to submit a comprehensive proposal (maximum 5,000 words), which must include:

- **Project objectives and methodology** – Describe how the project will be implemented (steps) within the course of its duration. Also, provide an indicative budget breakdown (personnel costs, travel, equipment, etc.) for the requested funding. Include a table of expected results at mid-term and at the end of the project. At this stage, applicants will need to provide detailed information on how their projects align with the Cultural Heritage Cloud. Those who progress beyond the first stage will receive training materials and guidelines to help ensure their projects are compatible and interoperable with the Cloud. Additionally, mentoring support will be available if needed.

- **Expected impact and sustainability plan** – Description of the project's expected contribution to Cultural Heritage Cloud, plans for long-term sustainability, and potential sector-wide influence.

- **Team composition and expertise** – Information on the project team, including relevant experience (incl. past projects), skills, and gender balance considerations.

- **Milestones and timeline** – Specification of at least three (minimum) and up to five (maximum) major milestones.

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Separately, applicants are also required to submit a budget alongside their proposal:

- **Budget breakdown and justification** – A detailed explanation of how the requested funds will be allocated across different project activities. Including: number of PMs requested, personnel costs requested, other costs (consumables, travel). Indirect costs: max. 25% flatrate.

Specific requirements for Stage 1 are listed in Section 4 below. The Stage 2 Full Proposal details (e.g., required sections, page limits, formatting guidelines) will be published along with the external evaluation of Stage 1 proposals announcement.

Calls will undergo a **peer-review process** involving both internal and external experts.

The submission deadline

Each Call has a specific deadline, which will be published on the ECHOES website. Proposals must be submitted by 23:59 CEST on the cut-off date.

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4. Proposal Structure for Call 1: Data

Here is an example of the form that Applicants are required to fill out in the application platform. It details the content required in the Concept Note of Stage 1 of the application process.

1. TITLE
Title of the project.

2. CONSORTIUM
Names the partner(s) involved.

Name	Country	Type of organisation

3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES (max. 500 words)

Please describe the applied usage scenario you intend to implement, highlighting which community will use this dataset? What will they use it for? What is the expected outcome at the end of the project? How will the results of the project benefit the wider Cultural Heritage community? Introduce the specific cultural heritage data you will utilise, the kind of processing and tooling you will use or need to implement the scenario as well as the expected outcome. And more specifically how you would like to make use of the Cultural Heritage Cloud. (Detailed description of the data is in section 5).

4. METHODOLOGY (max. 500 words)

Please outline the methods you plan to employ in conducting the scenario including outlining specific steps and accompanying workflows, highlighting any interdisciplinary aspects where relevant. Specify whether the project will incorporate existing datasets into the Cultural Heritage Cloud, or if it will enrich or generate new data during the project's lifecycle. If you intend to collaborate with different communities, explain how they contribute to the methods used. Detail how these varied approaches will enhance the understanding and management of cultural heritage data, whether you are working with entire collections or databases, individual items, or specific subsets.

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5. DATA (max. 900 words)

Include a description of the type and scope of data involved–its format, scale, and the level of detail it provides, whether it concerns broad collections, detailed individual objects, or specific groups of items. And its subject matter. If available, provide links or references to access the digital content or data payload involved in the project.

Describe the data - distinguishing between data used as input and delivered as output of the project - considering the following aspects:

- The kind of data - distinguishing between
  - ▸ the underlying CH objects: (included, but not limited to) manuscripts, newspapers, archaeological finds, monuments, songs, any other in/tangible heritage assets, (web archives, social media data).
  - ▸ their digital representation: images, texts, 3d models, audio, video, music notation, etc. (outline whether it consists of digitised and/or born-digital heritage)
- Size - number of files, size on disk (e.g. 1000 image files 80MB each, 1 SQL database, RDF-dataset with 30k resources and 150k triples)
- Granularity - inner structure of the data (collection consisting of files, hierarchical structure, database, knowledge graph)
- Format - file formats in which the data is available or will be made available (TIFF, RDF, TEI,…)
- The licenses (e.g. https://rightsstatements.org/) under which data is made available.
- The scope/coverage. spatial: e.g. Spain or Madrid or (x,y,z) coordinates & temporal: 18th century or relevant date/time e.g. Time: Periodo, Space: GeoNames, Semantic: BBT (Backbone Thesaurus), AAT (Getty), Pactols.
- What documentation and contextual information will be provided and in which form (metadata following a given format, paradata or other form of documentation).
- If there are semantic descriptions associated with the data and metadata and if so which models /ontologies are/will be used to base those descriptions upon (e.g. CIDOC-CRM).
- The type of trusted repository where the data will be stored, and how it will be identified—whether through persistent identifiers like PIDs or DOIs. Discuss the methods for metadata dissemination, such as through the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH), and how the data itself will be accessible, whether via APIs, data dumps, or through repositories like Git.
- If the dataset could be potentially used to train AI models (e.g. existence of labels, etc.), please describe how.
- Issues like data quality (accuracy, completeness, consistency, provenance, integrity, and metadata quality), data usage (access frequency, user engagement, integration rates, and other indicators of adoption), and regulatory compliance (adherence to legal frameworks and alignment with ECHOES guidelines) should be discussed in the proposal and indicated how they will be taken into account for the final product.

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6. ANTICIPATED IMPACT (max. 300 words)

Please detail the significance of your project both for the intended community it will serve and how the results will benefit the wider Cultural Heritage community. Highlight how your project will advance knowledge, current state-of-the-art practices or technology in the field, and specify the novel contributions it aims to make to the Cultural Heritage Cloud. Also, outline the ethical considerations of your project, such as measures to protect privacy, handle personal data responsibly, and ensure data sovereignty. Discuss how your project adheres to ethical standards, such as the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance.

7. ALIGNMENT WITH THE CULTURAL HERITAGE CLOUD (CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND DATA AVAILABILITY) (max. 400 words)

As the Cultural Heritage Cloud takes shape, cultural heritage datasets will need to align with the **ECHOES Conceptual Model** which is being developed by ECHOES. This will include **Heritage Digital Twins** which will provide state-of-the-art digital information about a real-world heritage asset with its tangible and intangible components. This will be formally organised in a semantic framework, building on existing ontologies, such as CIDOC-CRM. Given this, please describe the approach you would take to align your cultural heritage data to ensure compatibility and interoperability with the Cultural Heritage Cloud. Additionally, explain how the data from your project will be made accessible.

Outline your plans for the long-term availability of the data. Describe the strategies you will employ to ensure that the data remain accessible and usable over time, addressing any specific maintenance or updating protocols you intend to follow. This section should convey a clear plan for the sustainability and enduring value of the project's outputs within the digital heritage community.

8. TEAM COMPOSITION AND EXPERTISE (150 words per beneficiary)

Please provide a detailed description of the project team, emphasising the complementary skills and expertise of each member. Submissions by interdisciplinary consortia are encouraged. Highlight how the diverse backgrounds and specialisations within the team will contribute to the success of the project. Include information on the team's interdisciplinary makeup.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS TO BE UPLOADED

- Extract from official documents giving evidence of the organisation's legal status, e.g. commercial register, official journal, statutes, deed of incorporation, notarial deed, etc."
- Draft budget sheet.

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5. Evaluation

The evaluation is conducted in two stages:

Stage 1 Eligibility and relevance to the call (Concept Note)

Each proposal submitted will undergo a thorough evaluation by a panel of three internal evaluators. This assessment is designed to verify that each submission is **eligible**, **aligns with the objectives** outlined in the call, and has the **potential to make a significant impact**. To maintain the integrity and impartiality of the review process, we implement stringent measures to avoid any conflicts of interest. This includes a detailed screening process where we ensure that reviewers do not hold any direct or indirect connections with the applicant consortia or the proposals they evaluate.

Stage 2 (Full Proposal)

Peer-reviewed by three (internal and external) evaluators based on five key criteria:

- **Relevance** (threshold: 4/5) Proposals must demonstrate a strong alignment with the priorities of the ECHOES grant call. Projects should address the key challenges and opportunities within the scope of the Cultural Heritage Cloud. Proposals should clearly articulate how the project aligns with the strategic goals of the initiative, ensuring that the activities proposed are essential for advancing the state of cultural heritage preservation and digital engagement.

- **Impact** (threshold: 3/5) The proposed project must outline significant expected outcomes that will advance knowledge, technology, or practice in cultural heritage. Proposals should provide a clear impact pathway. Proposals demonstrating that their outcome datasets (due to unique qualities such as size, scope, nature, complexity, richness...) will enhance the evaluation and appraisal of various aspects of the Cultural Heritage Cloud tools and services will be rated more favorably.

- **Team quality** (threshold: 3/5) Proposals must demonstrate that the project team possesses the necessary expertise, skills, and experience to successfully execute the project. This includes the appropriate mix of technical knowledge, project management experience, and subject matter expertise relevant to the project's focus areas. The evaluation will consider the team's past experience in similar projects and their capacity to deliver the proposed outputs.

- **Justified resource allocation** (threshold: 3/5) Proposals must present a clear and rational budget that aligns with the project's objectives and activities. The budget

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should detail how the resources made available through the Grants Programme will be allocated efficiently to achieve the desired outcomes, including a breakdown of costs related to personnel, equipment, and other expenses.Mention the investments that have been made before, related to the project. Justifications should demonstrate value for money and the necessity of each budget item in relation to project activities.

- **Sustainability** (threshold: 3/5) Projects should exhibit a strong potential for sustainability beyond the funding period, outlining how the project's results will be maintained and utilised in the future. This includes plans for financial sustainability, the continuation of project activities, potential for scaling impacts, and integration of project outputs into broader initiatives. Proposals should also consider environmental sustainability in project design and execution.

Below, we detail the specific **weight assigned** to each criterion, guiding how proposals are scored and prioritized during the review process. This approach ensures that the diverse aspects of each proposal are considered proportionally.

CRITERION	PERCENTAGE
Relevance	30%
Impact	20%
Team quality	20%
Justified resource allocation	15%
Sustainability	15%

Applicants will receive feedback on their proposal. If your proposal meets the threshold but is not selected due to funding limitations, it may be placed on a reserve list.

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6. Funding and Budget

Maximum amount of funding available for Call 1

- **Call 1: Data** – Up to €60,000 per project (max. **12 projects** will be funded).
- **Call 2: Engagement and Collaboration**
- **Call 3: Data and Vertical Applications**

Distribution of funds after acceptance of the proposal

Funding is provided after successful conclusion of a Third-Party Project Agreement. It is provided in two lump-sum payments:

- **70%** upon signing the subgrant agreement.
- **30%** after successful project completion and submission of the final report.

Including subcontracting costs in the project budget

Costs such as hiring personnel, purchasing equipment/software, and subcontracting for software development are eligible. All expenses must be clearly justified in the budget breakdown.

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7. Project Implementation and Reporting

Duration and completion of projects

Each project must propose a timeline with **3 to 5 milestones**. The project duration will be 12 months. The applicants must commit to provide the final report 30 days after the end of the project.

Reporting requirements

Yes. Grantees must provide:

- An **interim report** that outlines progress relative to the project's milestones, to be submitted midway through the project.
- A **final report**, including a summary of results to be published on the ECHOES website and a detailed assessment of compatibility with the ECHOES Conceptual Model.
- A concise presentation of the methodology followed, results achieved, accessibility of data produced and sustainability of the results.

Measures in place in case a project does not meet its milestones

Failure to meet the agreed milestones within the specified timeline of the project may lead to the withholding of the final payment by the funding authority. If significant issues arise, the Grants Managing Partner (Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision) can require the implementation of corrective actions to address these, which could include revising project objectives, adjusting timelines, reallocating resources, or other measures aimed at realigning the project with its original goals.

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8. Legal and Administrative Matters

The applicable legal framework

Subgrants are subject to the terms and conditions, based on the **Horizon Europe Model Grant agreement**.

Contacting the ECHOES team for assistance

A helpdesk operated by Netherlands Institute for Sound & Vision is available to answer applicant questions. FAQs will be regularly updated on the ECHOES website.

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