



The
Europe
Challenge

The Europe Challenge 2025/26: Libraries, Communities, and Democracy Open Call

Across Europe, communities are coming together to tackle pressing challenges—from social isolation and disinformation to climate change, risks to our mental health, polarisation, and the evolving role of AI technologies. An inclusive and sustainable future is possible when we work in solidarity, listening to and learning from the creative solutions emerging locally.

Libraries are at the heart of this transformation. As safe spaces open to all, they provide access to reliable knowledge. Libraries empower residents to voice their concerns and find effective solutions to local challenges. Now more than ever, libraries are evolving into hubs of community engagement, where people can collaborate, build deep-rooted connections, and strengthen democracy from the ground up.



What is The Europe Challenge?

The Europe Challenge is an annual programme that brings together teams from libraries and communities across Europe to address pressing social, digital, and climate challenges. Libraries are invited to develop, share, and implement creative solutions with support from the European Cultural Foundation and its partners through an open call. The Europe Challenge is a unique growing network of European libraries that work together to enhance democratic participation and social and environmental well-being through citizen-led local change by connecting with each other across European borders.

The programme offers participating libraries and community groups the following opportunities:

- Funding of up to **EUR 10,000** to implement a proposed project (optional).
- A series of **online and in-person workshops and mentoring** sessions.
- Additional **peer-to-peer exchange opportunities, networking, and travel**.

Since 2020, 96 libraries and communities from 26 countries have participated in The Europe Challenge, implementing vital projects that have benefited over 150,000 Europeans of all ages and walks of life.

Learn more about The Europe Challenge: <https://theuropechallenge.eu/>

The Europe Challenge 2025/26 Timeline

- Call opening: **3 April 2025**
- Call closing: **29 May 2025 at 12.00 CEST**
- Selection results communicated to applicants: **from 3 July 2025 onwards**
- Projects start: **September 2025**
- Projects end: **September 2026**
- Learning programme duration: **September 2025 - September 2026**



Priority Topics of The Europe Challenge 2025/26

The Europe Challenge 2025/26 is seeking initiatives that address one or more of Europe's key transitions: social, digital, and green. We are looking for creative ideas from libraries and community groups that contribute to building a more inclusive, connected, and sustainable Europe.

- » **Social:** Initiatives that strengthen social inclusion, equality, active citizenship, and community wellbeing. This includes initiatives that support vulnerable or underrepresented groups, address low voter turnout, promote civic engagement and democratic participation, tackle issues such as inequality and polarisation, or focus on issues such as social isolation, mental health challenges, declining literacy skills and reading habits, or intergenerational divides.
- » **Digital:** Initiatives that enhance European digital citizenship by promoting tactics, skills, and behaviors that enable individuals to engage with digital content critically and democratically. These initiatives should foster more meaningful interaction and proactive democratic engagement in the digital space. This includes efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation, bridge digital divides, and encourage safe and responsible use of technology and social media. We are especially interested in initiatives that foster digital literacy among young people, tackle issues like fake news, and address challenges arising from rapid AI developments.
- » **Green:** Initiatives that promote environmental sustainability, climate awareness, and resilience within libraries and communities. This includes initiatives focused on environmental education, sustainable practices, and community-led climate action. We particularly welcome creative green/climate projects implemented on the ground, from community gardens to installing beehives around library spaces.

“The Europe Challenge is like fresh air – seeing that there’s a bunch of crazy people all over Europe, all trying to make libraries better places like I am, gave me so much renewed energy!”

2024 participant

Outline of the Programme

Running from September 2025 to September 2026, The Europe Challenge 2025/26 offers selected Challenge teams* the following opportunities:



**A Challenge team is made up of one library and one community representative.*

Selected Challenge teams are expected to be available and take part in the entire learning programme. Understanding that library and community workers often juggle heavy workloads and tight schedules, the learning programme is designed to provide practical support and meaningful opportunities for pan-European exchange, without placing a significant additional strain on participants' time.

From September 2025 to September 2026, participants will have access to monthly **online summits** to help them with the design and implementation of their projects (some obligatory and other optional/elective). The learning programme is centred around the needs of community librarianship, considering the roles of both library workers working with communities and community organisers working with libraries. It is designed to be relevant and practical for their work, helping with the development and implementation of their proposed projects on the ground. The sessions will be co-created by the growing community of both past and incoming Challenge participants, ensuring that the content is tailored to real-world experiences and challenges.



Teams will also have the **opportunity to request a mentor** who will provide coaching and guidance throughout their project journey. Mentors are alumni of the programme and will be carefully matched with participating teams based on the focus and needs of their projects. Teams who apply for a mentor will benefit from personalised advice and insights tailored to their library's and community's specific challenges. Acting as critical friends and buddies, mentors will help participating teams strengthen their international network and deepen their engagement with The Europe Challenge programme.

The programme offers participants the chance to attend **two in-person summits**—one in autumn 2025 and another in June 2026—where Challenge teams can connect with peers and colleagues from across Europe. These gatherings have proven invaluable in previous editions, fostering knowledge exchange and building relationships among participants tackling similar challenges. Both summits will be held in accessible European locations, with all travel and accommodation expenses covered.

Additionally, the programme is designed to **showcase participating initiatives**, not only at the live summits but also during a final webinar series scheduled for September 2026. This provides a platform to share expertise, showcase your work to key stakeholders in the library sector, and expand your organisation's network and impact.

For more detailed information about the learning programme, [please consult the FAQ document](#). For inspirational examples, you can browse all 96 successful initiatives from the first three editions of The Europe Challenge [here](#). You can also read about all past initiatives in our free publication, [How Libraries Thrive](#), or watch Challenge case study videos in [the Resources library on our website](#).



Eligibility Criteria

- The application form must be completed in English, with no question left unanswered.
- Applicants must indicate one main partner to receive any funding that was applied for and awarded. This is normally the library, but if this is not feasible, the community group can be designated as the main partner.
- Only libraries and community groups based in the following countries can apply:
 - A** Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan
 - B** Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria
 - C** Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic
 - D** Denmark
 - E** Estonia
 - F** Finland, France
 - G** Georgia, Germany, Greece
 - H** Hungary
 - I** Iceland, Ireland, Italy
 - K** Kosovo
 - L** Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg
 - M** Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro
 - N** The Netherlands, Northern Macedonia, Norway
 - P** Poland, Portugal
 - R** Romania
 - S** San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland
 - T** Turkey
 - U** Ukraine, the United Kingdom
- At least one of the co-applicants must be registered as a legal entity. Both co-applicants must be represented by individuals who are at least 18 years old.
- Proposals involving political parties or organisations affiliated with political parties (unions, lobby groups, campaign funders etc.) as associate partners are not eligible.
- Applicants are expected to implement fair and sociable working conditions and transparent governance in relation to project staff, freelancers, volunteers, and service providers.
- A working proficiency in English is required to fully participate in the programme. Some assistance can be provided upon request to facilitate attendance at live meetings. For the online learning exchanges, however, Challenge teams are expected to arrange interpretive services themselves, if needed.
- Neither the library nor the community of choice has participated in previous editions of The Europe Challenge programme.



“Participating in The Europe Challenge has pushed our library outside of its comfort zone by collaborating with realities that are different from each other, but with common goals.”

2024 participant

Selection Criteria

In addition to addressing one of the three priority topics (social, digital, green), proposals from Challenge teams will be selected according to the following selection criteria:

- » **Local relevance** – the proposal addresses an urgent challenge for both the library and the local community. Additional involvement of local government or other local institutions is encouraged but not mandatory.
- » **Creativity** – the proposal presents fresh, creative, and innovative ways to address a local challenge.
- » **Inclusivity** – the proposal reflects the shared ambitions of the library workers and community members.
- » **Scalability** – the proposal is implemented locally but with the potential to be scaled elsewhere.
- » **Climate sustainability** – the proposal embodies a convincing understanding of fair and green (“just”) transition in Europe.
- » **European relevance** – the proposal complies with European values of democracy, transparency, and inclusivity. It contributes to a positive European sentiment and solidarity regarding shared social, digital, and green challenges.
- » **Impact** - the proposal is able to explain (and quantify) how it will have a positive impact on people and/or the environment (trans)locally.

Selection Process

A three-stage selection process allows a review which considers regional interests, thematic focuses, and priorities regarding diversity, inclusion, environmental awareness, and the available funds:

- » Technical eligibility check and pre-selection process by ECF staff.
- » Second reading and scoring process by external advisors (including regional funding partners and library and community representatives across Europe from the alumni network of the programme).
- » Final selection meeting with all external advisors.

In addition to ECF's own funding which can support libraries in all eligible countries, we are delighted to be working with funding partners representing different regional areas of Europe. Advisors representing these Europe Challenge partners will be involved in the selection process of libraries in their respective priority locations.

The results of the selection process will be communicated from 3 July 2025 onwards. Regrettably, we are unable to provide feedback to applicants who have not been selected.

“The most important outcome of The Europe Challenge programme for us has been personal—realising we’re part of a network working toward something bigger for our communities.”

2024 participant



To Apply

To apply, please visit the:

[**Application website**](#)

create an account and, when ready, submit your application.

**The deadline for submitting your proposal is
Thursday 29 May 2025 at 12.00 (noon) CEST.**

Questions?

If you have questions that are not covered on our website, the open call document, or [this FAQ file](#), follow these steps:

- » **Check the Q&A Sheet** – Before submitting a question, review [this Q&A sheet](#) to see if your question has already been answered.
- » **Submit Your Question** – If you don't find an answer, use the [Q&A form](#) to submit your question.
 - » The form is open from **Thursday 10 April at 9.00 CEST to Thursday 15 May 2025 at 12.00 (noon) CEST.**
 - » Responses will be added to the Q&A sheet within **3 working days.**
- » **Bookmark the Q&A Sheet** – Keep the link handy to stay updated on new responses.

If your question is very specific and requires more attention than a simple Q&A response, you can contact The Europe Challenge team at theuropechallenge@culturalfoundation.eu.

Please note that due to a high volume of emails, we may not be able to reply immediately.

Partners

About the European Cultural Foundation

The European Cultural Foundation was founded in 1954 to help construct a united Europe where we can live, work, play, dream and express ourselves freely, share a sense of belonging based on solidarity and mutual respect, and collaborate across borders of all kinds, in harmony and in the fullness of our diversity. Since then, the European Cultural Foundation has initiated and supported projects in culture, civil society, environment and education throughout Europe to promote this sense of belonging. In its nearly 70 years of existence, the foundation has supported thousands of Europeans and organisations with grants and exchanges and has succeeded in putting culture and cultural policies on the European agenda.

More information: <https://culturalfoundation.eu/>

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in England. Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences to enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries - from theatre to digital art - reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.

More information: <https://artscouncil.org.uk/>

About Fondazione Cariplo

Fondazione Cariplo is a philanthropic organisation leveraging its financial and human resources as well as planning and assistance capabilities to promote and back endeavours pursuing the common good and aiding individuals to fulfil their potential. Currently, the themes on which Fondazione Cariplo places more emphasis are fighting inequality, especially by aiding the most vulnerable, and promoting social and economic growth at the local level. The Foundation was established in 1991 under the Amato-Carli Act. Its roots however go as far back as 1816 when, amidst the ruins of Napoleonic Wars, a philanthropic organization was created to help people in need and lay the groundwork for development and growth in the region. The commitment of Fondazione Cariplo to creating opportunities and value for people and local communities goes back in the centuries to those times and that philanthropic organisation, and has been playing out in the Foundation's support to arts and culture, environmental, social and scientific research endeavours.

More information: <https://www.fondazionecariplo.it/>

About the Scottish Library & Information Council

The Scottish Library & Information Council is the independent advisory body to the Scottish Government on library and information matters. SLIC's greatest strength is a membership which includes public sector libraries, higher education institutions, further education colleges, health libraries and special interest libraries. Every member brings expertise, knowledge, and innovation to the library sector. By working together, that expertise is shared through SLIC. The goal of the Scottish Library and Information Council is to support library and information services in Scotland through service innovation, funding provision and informative research. This is achieved through six Strategic Aims: Advocacy, Standards, Innovation, Partnership, Funding, Research.

More information: <https://scottishlibraries.org/>

Watch the video on The Europe Challenge

“The Europe Challenge made Europe feel closer—like Europe came all the way to us, to our small town in the south. It breathed a European air into a neighbourhood that focuses inward, looking at its own belly button all too often.”

2024 participant



The Europe Challenge

The Europe Challenge 2025/26 is initiated by the European Cultural Foundation.

**European
Cultural
Foundation**

The 2025/26 edition is kindly supported by public funding through [Arts Council England](#), [Fondazione Cariplo](#), and the [Scottish Library and Information Council](#).



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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UK Government**

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