

Living Cultural Heritage

Where Legacy Becomes Future

The post-earthquake recovery of Castelli, Abruzzo.

An invitation to advise.

MAESTRIA INC. · THE CASTELLI PROJECT · 2026

The Castelli, Italy project is the post-earthquake recovery of the village — an international cultural treasure since the fourteenth century.

Who's already involved?

The Government of Italy

Has committed comprehensive funding for sustainable post-earthquake reconstruction.

Maestria

A newly formed international foundation, engaging global resources to restore Castelli's cultural-tourism features and ensure economic sustainability for generations to come.

Castelli invites your valued advice on how to proceed.

THIS IS NOT A SOLICITATION FOR FUNDING

A Letter from the Mayor

From a village in the heart of Italy, an artistic inheritance that belongs to the world

COMUNE DI CASTELLI

PROVINCIA DI TERAMO · REGIONE ABRUZZO

To the friends of Castelli, near and far,

I WRITE TO YOU FROM CASTELLI, a small medieval village in the heart of Italy, in the beautiful region of Abruzzo. Its name may be unfamiliar to many beyond Italy. Yet the art created here has travelled far beyond our mountains and has written an enduring chapter in the history of world art.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Castelli became one of Europe's great centres of artistic ceramics. Its masters developed new pigments, refined firing techniques and transformed *maiolica* into a pictorial art of extraordinary sophistication. Castelli ceramics were commissioned and collected by tsars, kings and popes. Today, masterpieces created in this village are preserved in institutions including the Louvre, the British Museum, the Hermitage and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Thus, a small village in Abruzzo is represented in museums that define the history of art itself.

This greatness was not the achievement of one artist or one moment. It was the collective work of an entire community, carried forward across generations. The family *bottega* was at once a home, a school and a laboratory. Parents taught children; masters formed apprentices; families such as the Pompei, Grue, Gentile and Pardi preserved their own colours, techniques and artistic judgement while contributing to a shared tradition. For the people of Castelli, this history is not decoration and it is not nostalgia. It is our identity and a profound source of pride, still alive in the knowledge and hands of our artisans.

In 1906, that civic commitment found a lasting institutional form. Beniamino Olivieri, then Mayor of Castelli, together with the distinguished archaeologist Felice Barnabei, founded the School of Ceramic Art. Today, it is one of Italy's oldest schools dedicated to ceramic art and remains a rare centre of specialised artistic education. As a successor to Mayor Olivieri, I regard that act not only as part of our history, but as an instruction: each generation has a duty to pass this inheritance forward.

That living chain is now in danger. The earthquakes of 2009 and 2016 caused severe physical and economic damage, accelerated depopulation and weakened the conditions in which workshops and knowledge could pass from one generation to the next. Buildings can be restored and objects can be conserved. But when knowledge disappears with the last people who hold it, no reconstruction can bring back its full authenticity. Our task is therefore not simply to save what remains, but to give our young people a reason to stay, and those who have left a reason to return.

For this reason, the decision of the Foundation to choose Castelli as its inaugural project carries great meaning. Its mission recognises that preservation cannot end with protecting what previous generations created. It must also protect the people, educational institutions and places through which new generations will learn, practise, innovate and create again.

Within its institutional responsibilities, the *Comune di Castelli* welcomes constructive cooperation with the Foundation and with the public, educational and cultural authorities whose participation will be essential. This work must be transparent, respectful of the community and guided by a long-term commitment to the public interest.

To those who may stand with the Foundation, I offer this appeal: a small village in the heart of Italy gave the world a great artistic tradition. Today, the world has an opportunity to help keep it alive — so that future generations inherit not only the masterpieces of Castelli, but the living knowledge capable of creating new ones.

With respect, and in shared purpose,

Paolo Tancredi
SINDACO DI CASTELLI
Mayor of Castelli
Comune di Castelli · Provincia di Teramo

Why now?

Reconstruction is finally beginning.

After two earthquakes, seventeen years of waiting are coming to an end. Public funding is reopening buildings that have stood closed since the ground first moved. It is a real beginning. But many houses are still empty, and fewer than one hundred people now live in Castelli.

Rebuilding walls is not the same as restoring life.

The deeper damage is not in the buildings.

1 The chain is breaking.

For five centuries this craft has passed from one pair of hands to the next, master to apprentice, without interruption. The masters are still at their wheels and their benches. Too few young people now stand beside them to learn what they know.

2 The botteghe are closing.

Many already have. Those still working cannot afford to repair their spaces or take on an apprentice.

3 The school is losing its next generation.

New enrolment has fallen away, and with it the path from the classroom to the workshop.

4 The village cannot receive what it needs.

Castelli is admired in museums far from Italy and barely known as a place one can visit. There is nowhere for students and visitors to stay, and little that turns distant admiration into people arriving, learning, and staying.

The future is decided before it is built.

The study that decides what Castelli becomes completes in December 2026.
Until then, your judgement can still change the answer.

Who is Maestria?

Maestria Inc. is committed to advancing the Mayor's vision and, equally important, the needs and interests of residents, world travellers, students, and future generations.

Maestria has the plan and the capacity to bring together international philanthropic, grantor and institutional investment to recover Castelli's cultural, artistic and educational infrastructure; and to develop and fund new initiatives — refreshing Castelli's historic architecture, adding infrastructure that supports cultural tourism, and enhancing educational opportunities to attract international students, including the addition of a new *music curriculum* to the internationally renowned ceramic design school, founded in 1906.

Maestria's mission

To identify and develop mutually advantageous partnerships, provide resources, and design a strategic plan supported by international philanthropy, grant awards and earned-income initiatives — culminating in a Castelli supported by cultural tourism.

The immediate task is both simple and consequential.

Strengthen

what Castelli already has.

Expand

the possibilities open to it.

Secure

the conditions in which exceptional advancement can thrive.

A detailed outline is available on request, or as a twenty-minute virtual walkthrough at a time that suits you.
us02web.zoom.us/j/6540137469

What's At Stake

Preserving Castelli's Living Cultural Heritage Before It Is Too Late

For more than five centuries, the small village of Castelli, nestled beneath the Gran Sasso mountains in Abruzzo, has been home to one of Italy's most extraordinary traditions in ceramic art. Its masterpieces have traveled far beyond Italy, finding their place in the world's most prestigious museums and collections.

Yet Castelli's greatest inheritance is not only the art it has created but also the knowledge, skills, and artistic traditions passed from one generation to the next.

The 2009 and 2016 earthquakes severely damaged the village and accelerated the decline of a community whose identity and livelihood have been inseparable from ceramics for centuries.

Today, the Italian State is investing about EUR 250 million to rebuild Castelli, offering an extraordinary opportunity to restore its physical infrastructure.

But rebuilding a village does not necessarily bring its life back.

Without immediate action, Castelli risks losing the very people, knowledge, and historic places that make its heritage unique.

Maestria Inc. and Castelli leadership have identified three urgent priorities.



1. The School

— *Safeguarding the Next Generation*



At the heart of Castelli's artistic heritage stands the *Liceo Artistico* "F.A. Grue", founded in 1906.[1]

It is one of only four schools of its artistic specialization in Italy—an exceptional national distinction that reflects the importance of the artistic education Castelli has offered for generations.

The school represents the future of a tradition that has survived through centuries of master-to-apprentice transmission. Yet declining enrollment and the gradual disappearance of experienced artisans threaten this continuity.

With international partners and support, Maestria intends to support the school's renewal and expansion, strengthening its educational programs, attracting students from Italy and abroad, and creating opportunities for closer collaboration between students and master artisans.

A key part of this vision is establishing a *Research Center for Ceramic Art and Heritage*, dedicated to studying, documenting, preserving, and advancing Castelli's artistic knowledge, historical techniques, and craftsmanship.

Our ambition is to transform Castelli into an internationally recognized center of artistic education, research and cultural exchange.





2. The Botteghe

— *Protecting the Knowledge That Cannot Be Recreated*

For centuries, Castelli's master artisans have preserved their knowledge through family workshops, known as *botteghe*.



These workshops are far more than places of production. They are living repositories of artistic knowledge, where techniques, colors, methods, and creative judgment have been transmitted across generations.

Today, many have closed. Others are struggling to survive, and too few young people are entering the profession.

When a master artisan disappears without passing on that knowledge, an irreplaceable part of Castelli's cultural inheritance may disappear as well.

Maestria aims to support the remaining *botteghe*, strengthen their economic viability, encourage apprenticeships, and create the conditions for a new generation of artisans to continue this tradition.

Preserving living cultural heritage means preserving the people who carry it forward.





3. The Historic Village

— *Protecting the Places Where Art Was Born*

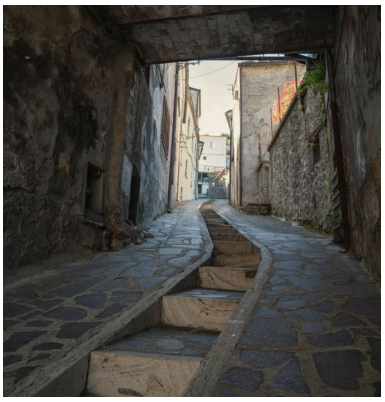
Castelli's medieval village is itself an essential part of its artistic heritage.

For centuries, ceramic production was woven into everyday life. Many historic houses contained workshops and production facilities on their lower floors, while the artisans and their families lived above.

Some of these remarkable medieval production sites still exist.

However, as reconstruction begins, a new threat is emerging.

Both earthquake-damaged and still-accessible historic properties are increasingly being offered for sale. Rising interest in the village risks turning these buildings into speculative assets and private holiday residences.







A village of second homes cannot replace a living community.

Even more concerning is the possibility that extraordinary historic ceramic production sites will be converted into private basements or storage spaces, permanently removing them from the village's cultural life and public access.

Maestria intends to acquire and safeguard selected historic properties, particularly those containing exceptional ceramic production sites.

By preserving these buildings and bringing their historic workshops back into use and making them accessible to the public, we aim to protect both Castelli's architectural character and its artistic identity.

The objective is not to create a beautifully restored village that stands empty for much of the year, but to ensure that Castelli remains a place where people live, work, learn and create.

Three Urgent Priorities. One Shared Future.

1. The school preserves the transmission of knowledge.
2. The *botteghe* preserve the practice of that knowledge.
3. The historic village preserves the places and community in which this knowledge can continue to live.

Together, they form the foundations of Castelli's identity.

The Italian State is rebuilding Castelli's physical infrastructure. Maestria's mission is to help ensure that its living cultural heritage has a future.

This is living cultural heritage — not a memory, but a life still unfolding.

Who's Who

The people and institutions accountable for the work — the governing Board, the honorary Council, the operational team, and the Italian partners through whom the project is realised.

I Board of Directors GOVERNANCE & ADVISORY

The Board comprises the President, independent voting Directors, and a non-voting Board Member and Advisor — a composition that lets the Foundation scale its governance as international operations grow, ensuring effective administration while maintaining a consistent quorum for every strategic decision.

BOARD LEADERSHIP & VOTING MEMBERS



Snežana Sidjanski

FOUNDER & PRESIDENT · VOTING MEMBER

Leads strategic networking between US donors and the structures in Italy, manages the principal capital campaign, and provides comprehensive oversight of the Foundation's operations.

Snežana Sidjanski is the founder of Maestria, dedicated to protecting living cultural heritage and the communities that carry it forward. Her commitment began in Castelli in [2012/2013], where years spent among local families and artisans revealed how urgently its centuries-old ceramic tradition — and the knowledge behind it — needed a viable future. That same connection to Castelli later led her to found *Árgillarte*, a ceramics venture through which she works directly with several of the village's workshops. Maestria's mission is broader: to ensure that Castelli's knowledge is transmitted, its communities strengthened, and its traditions given a future.

> All corporate and operational matters relating to *Árgillarte* are governed strictly by the Foundation's conflict-of-interest policy, with the President fully recused from any related Board decision.



Emily Shurr

INDEPENDENT DIRECTOR · VOTING MEMBER

Responsible for the Foundation's financial stability, fiduciary oversight, regulatory compliance, and the expansion of the donor network within the US market.

Emily Shurr is a nonprofit strategist, organizational advisor, and publisher who helps organizations turn ambitious ideas into programs, partnerships, and sustainable capacity. Her consulting has included leading universities, the Singapore Ministry of Education, and cultural and educational organizations in the United States and India. Known for combining warmth, structure, and creative problem solving, she holds an M.A. in Religion and Ethics from Yale University and founded *Mental Temple Publishing*.



Ernesto Di Giovanni

INDEPENDENT DIRECTOR · VOTING MEMBER

Participates in strategic planning, ensures alignment of Board operations with U.S. regulations, and strengthens relationships with institutional donors.

Ernesto Di Giovanni is an international lobbyist, political adviser, and government affairs specialist. A law graduate of LUISS Guido Carli with a postgraduate Master's in Public and Parliamentary Affairs from LUMSA, he is a former partner of UTOPIA, President and Co-Founder of the Transatlantic Investment Committee, and Vice President of AMERIGO. A U.S. State Department IVLP Fellow, he also advises cultural and institutional initiatives, including *La Notte dei Serpenti*.



Marcel Kaminstein

TREASURER · VOTING MEMBER

With a strong commitment to social impact and business advocacy, Mr. Kaminstein is currently on the boards of AiBioTek Association, Kaminstein Family Office, Pro Business PAC, American Club of Rome, and Maestria Foundation. His focus is on strategic leadership and leveraging social media marketing to promote business-friendly policies and enhance the well-being of communities globally.

PLANNED EXPANSION & BOARD RECRUITMENT

Looking ahead to our next phase of development, the Foundation is actively executing a strategic recruitment process for new independent US Directors. These future positions are reserved for established professionals in international law, non-profit management, and global philanthropy.

STATUTORY ADVISORY & NON-VOTING BOARD LEADERSHIP



Maleša Ulrico Sidjanski, MSc ETH

BOARD MEMBER & ADVISOR · NON-VOTING

As defined in the Foundation's Statute, attends Board meetings to provide strategic, technical, and high-level advisory guidance during the organisation's initial development phase. Holds no voting rights on corporate, financial, or governance matters, and is exempt from the governance liabilities and mandatory financial commitments of voting Directors.

Maleša Sidjanski, a biochemical engineer (ETH Zürich) with a further degree in marketing management from the University of St. Gallen, spent 28 years as CEO Switzerland of *IBSA Institut Biochimique*, growing the business from CHF 5 million to CHF 80 million. Son of the founders of the *Nord-Süd Verlag* children's book publisher — his mother its Art Director for fifty years — he brings that eye for craft to Castelli through *Árgillarte*, the ceramics venture he co-founded.

II Council of Ambassadors HONORARY BOARD

Members serve in a non-governing, honorary capacity under the Council's guidelines. They do not attend formal Board meetings, make no mandatory financial contributions, and hold no voting rights or regulatory liabilities.

Paolo Tancredi

AMBASSADOR · HONORARY COUNCIL

As the current Mayor of the *Comune di Castelli*, provides institutional patronage, represents local community interests, and strengthens ties between the Abruzzo region and US donors — a local leader dedicated to post-earthquake reconstruction, economic development, and the centuries-old tradition of artistic craftsmanship.

Professor Dušan Sidjanski

AMBASSADOR · HONORARY COUNCIL

An internationally recognised political scientist and a leading scholar of European integration and federalism. Professor Emeritus at the University of Geneva, he founded its Department of Political Science and co-founded the University Institute of European Studies. He served as Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission from 2004 to 2014, and is Co-Chairman of the European Cultural Centre — advancing European cooperation and intercultural dialogue.

Sacha Sidjanski, Ph.D.

AMBASSADOR · HONORARY COUNCIL

Combines expertise in science, global health, and societal impact. Holder of a Bachelor of Science and a doctorate in parasitology, he worked in malaria research and with the World Health Organization before joining EPFL's External Relations team in 2006. In 2015 he co-initiated *HelloMask*, leading to *HM Care* — an EPFL spin-off developing a certified translucent medical mask. His experience includes relationship building and donor reporting.

III Expert Team & Operational Management

PROJECT SUPPORT

Avatar Company — Lead Development Consultant

FLORIDA · EST. 1978

A renowned US-based firm providing comprehensive support for organisational operations and fundraising campaigns.

Maleša Ulrico Sidjanski, MSc ETH — Institutional Realignment Expert

COMPENSATED OPERATIONAL

Primary on-the-ground technical liaison for all operations in Italy: technical execution, local institutional alignment, and heritage preservation in keeping with Castelli's authentic craftsmanship traditions (*botteghe*).

> *This operational appointment, its compensation, and the execution of the contract are subject to final independent review and approval by the disinterested, voting members of the Board, in full compliance with the Foundation's Conflict of Interest Policy.*

PLANNED PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT & OVERSIGHT · IN FORMATION

These roles are defined and appointed in sequence as the campaign proceeds; their scope follows the feasibility study completing in December 2026.

Financial Support — INDEPENDENT US CPA

A licensed CPA agency ensuring full compliance and transparency of donations under 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Legal Counsel — SPECIALISED FIRM

Handling international contracts, governance agreements, and scholarship agreements.

Advisory Council for Reconstruction — ITALIAN EXPERTS

Italian architects, conservators, and art historians overseeing the on-site restoration process.

IV Italian Institutional Framework

IMPLEMENTED IN CLOSE COORDINATION WITH KEY INSTITUTIONS IN ITALY

Comune di Castelli — Municipality — OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT

The Office of the Mayor has formally supported the Foundation's establishment by official letter — emphasising post-earthquake reconstruction, the fight against depopulation, and the preservation of living craftsmanship as world cultural heritage.

Art School for Ceramics — PLANNED COLLABORATION

Continuing the legacy of the school founded in 1906 — scholarships for young talent and knowledge transfer to new generations.

Soprintendenza — Heritage Protection, Abruzzo — REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The official heritage-protection authority responsible for the mandatory expert evaluation and approval of all conservation and restoration plans before any work begins on historical buildings.

V Creative & Technical Support CREDITS

Andrej Capin — Webmaster & Designer. Member of the Founding & Fundraising Strategic Partner Team. Responsible for the Foundation's visual identity, the design of this brochure, and the development of the digital donation platform for its leading US consulting firm.

Privacy & Governance. *All personal data, professional credentials, biographies, and photographs of the Board, team, and associates featured here are processed and published in strict compliance with US data-protection standards and EU GDPR. Each individual has executed a formal Universal Privacy & Media Release Consent Form authorising the use of their information for institutional purposes.*

The numbers

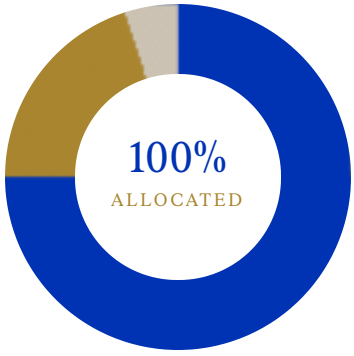
Where the campaign expects its support to come from, and where it is intended to go.

A · PROJECTED CAMPAIGN INCOME SOURCES



- **Contributions & Pledges** — 82%
  Individual and institutional gifts, pledged over the campaign period.
- **Grants** — 8%
  Awards from foundations and public programmes.
- **Earned Income** — 5%
  Revenue generated by the project itself.
- **Planned Gifts** — 5%
  Bequests and deferred commitments.

B · PROJECTED INCOME DISTRIBUTION



- **Project Delivery in Castelli** — 75%
  The restoration work itself, and the institutions that carry it.
- **Campaign & Administration** — 20%
  Raising the capital, and the governance and reporting that account for it.
- **Contingency & Reserve** — 5%
  Held against currency movement and the unforeseen.

> The current campaign goal is projected at €21 million.

These are initial projections, based on outcomes from comparable campaigns conducted by Avatar Company, Inc. since 1978. Evidence-based projections follow completion of the international Castelli project feasibility study, due December 2026. Confirmed percentages await an architectural and comprehensive recipient-needs assessment, a Certified Public Accounting firm audit, and review by the United States Internal Revenue Service as part of the IRS 990 reporting process.

How it works

The project development plan follows proven nonprofit-sector principles to secure funding from all sources, including grants and earned income. This best-practice model is similar to how the for-profit sector tests a new product before going to market: a prototype is developed, and select markets are engaged to evaluate it. This is the Castelli process.

Maestria has presented an overview of its vision. Now we want your valued advice.

CIRCLE I

Project Description

A print and electronic introduction designed for study candidates. The description reflects Castelli's history, status and plan.

CIRCLE II

Survey Audiences

The study audience selection criteria are those with vetted potential to support the project, and the capacity to impact the desired outcome.

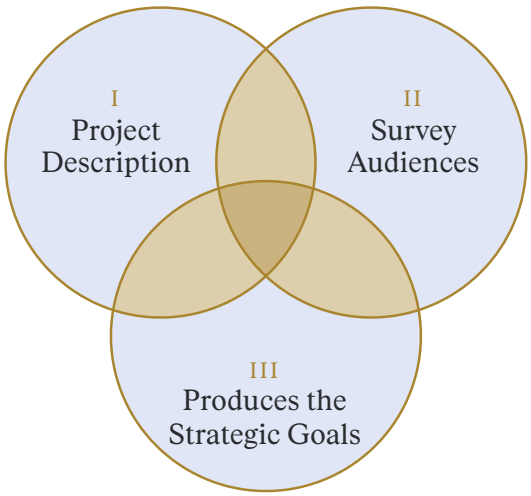
Examples may include: vetted international Italian heritage associations; Italian business owners and chief executives; professional associations such as doctors and lawyers; Italian tourism businesses; Italian and heritage celebrities; select international foundations; hotel and restaurant associations; the Italian government; and sources within the City of Castelli.

Study interview methodologies: personal · virtual · electronic survey · group sessions.

CIRCLE III

Produces the Strategic Goals

This best-practice, nonprofit-sector-preferred standard process objectively measures project compatibility and fundability among select vital audiences. The findings produce a tested strategic campaign plan with supporting collateral materials, and identify solutions to issues raised during data gathering.



WHERE THE THREE MEET

the tested campaign

May we ask your advice?

You have been carefully selected. Your judgement helps Maestria decide whether, and how, to proceed.

We invite you to take part in a study that will let Maestria make audience-informed decisions about the recovery of Castelli. It asks what you think of the project — its vision, its credibility, and whether it merits international support. It does not ask you for anything else.

Four ways to take part

I In person

A conversation at a time and place that suits you.

II Virtual

The same conversation, by video, in about twenty minutes.

III Electronic survey

Answered in your own time. Your responses are confidential.

IV Group session

A small, moderated discussion with others considering the project.

Let us know if and how to advance the saving of Castelli.



Takes about ten minutes. Your responses are confidential.
surveymonkey.com/r/KJVHF8Y

To arrange a conversation — in person, by video, or as a group session — write to Bob Kovacevich at avatarway@iCloud.com or call 407-620-9473.

This is not a solicitation for funding. Your responses are confidential, and no response constitutes a financial commitment of any kind.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

1 Liceo Artistico Statale per il Design “F.A. Grue”, Castelli, founded 1906 — liceoartisticogrue.edu.it

This is living cultural heritage — *not a memory, but a life still unfolding.*

Maestria Inc. is a United States 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization (status pending). Castelli, in Abruzzo, is its inaugural project.

MAESTRIA INC. · THE CASTELLI PROJECT · 2026

© 2026 Maestria Inc.

Campaign planning and the feasibility study are conducted by Avatar Company, Inc., a nonprofit-sector consultancy licensed by the Florida Division of Consumer Services since 1980 (Registration #FC3189).