LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators -1st Call.

Open call to fund an incubator to support Generative AI and Large Language Model startups

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LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Program 2026

1. Introduction

The **LLM-BRIDGE** Consortium invites qualified incubation and innovation partners to apply for participation in the LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme (VIP): **an EU-funded initiative designed to accelerate the emergence of European startups developing solutions powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) and Generative AI (GenAI).** This call seeks one incubator or accelerator capable of delivering a structured incubation programme that combines entrepreneurial mentoring, technical resources provided collaboratively with the LLM-BRIDGE consortium, and responsible-AI guidance, supporting Europe's leadership in trustworthy and multilingual AI. Activities will run through 2026.

This Open Call for Incubator[1], is launched under the FSTP programme of LLM-BRIDGE Project[2]. The strategic objective of LLM-BRIDGE is to establish a **pan-European innovation ecosystem that supports the uptake and integration of LLMs across sectors**, reinforcing European technological sovereignty, ethical AI leadership, and digital autonomy. The project aims to bridge research, innovation, and market deployment by linking technical excellence (HPC resources, data spaces, and benchmark infrastructures) with entrepreneurial capacity-building[3]. This contributes to the European Digital Decade goals and the EU's AI Act implementation by promoting safe, transparent, and human-centric AI innovation.

Within this framework, the **LLM-BRIDGE VIP** aims to identify and empower an incubator engaged in early-stage startups in the fields of in GenAI, multilingual AI, and Natural Language Processing (NLP). This call aims to identify and select one incubator to run a 12-week program designed to helping startups validate markets, refine business models, and prepare for scaling through the Acceleration programme (upcoming call within the LLM-BRIDGE project) and future European Grand Challenges. The VIP programme aims to foster cross-disciplinary collaboration between AI researchers, entrepreneurs, and industry actors to create responsible AI solutions that reflect Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity, offering a unique opportunity to the selected incubator to work directly with key stakeholders and cutting-edge research teams enabling contribution to the European GenAI ecosystem.

This call is implemented by 28DIGITAL in collaboration with the partners in the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium. Through this **call,** the LLM-BRIDGE consortium seeks a partner who shares its mission to contribute to European AI innovation having sustainable economic and societal impact, while gaining visibility, strategic positioning, and access to a Europe-wide network of AI innovators. The selected incubator will not only support breakthrough startups, but also strengthen its own role as a leading actor in Europe's rapidly expanding GenAI landscape, contributing to the development of a resilient ecosystem for the next generation of European GenAI start-ups.

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[1] *Incubators may include: VC, accelerators, innovation consultancies, business and tech parks among other entities*
[2] *Co-funded by the Digital Europe Programme DIGITAL-2024-BESTUSE-07 under Grant Agreement No. 101226136*
[3] *This and upcoming calls under the Venture Incubation and Long Jump programmes.*

The selection process is described in this document and comprises the following steps: Eligibility Check, Independent Evaluation, Consensus Meeting, Panel Ranking, ensuring transparency, impartiality, and compliance with the EU Digital Europe Programme principles of fairness and excellence.

2. Strategic Context and Objectives

The Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) serves as an instrument to strengthening incubation capacity in Europe to support early-stage GenAI ventures as well as to:

1) Accelerate the commercialisation of LLM technologies, providing mentoring, access to high-performance computing (HPC) resources, data infrastructures, and regulatory guidance.

2) Promote responsible AI innovation, aligned with the AI Act, Data Act, GDPR, and the EU's Digital Decade Targets.

3) Foster cross-border collaboration, knowledge sharing, and participation of underrepresented regions and groups in the European AI ecosystem.

Through this call, LLM-BRIDGE seeks to identify and support one high-quality incubator capable of supporting startups in the transforming of early-stage GenAI ideas into viable, scalable, and ethically compliant ventures that may be eligible to apply for the future Long Jump and European Grand Challenges. Participating in the VIP provides an opportunity for a leading incubator to position itself at the forefront of Europe's generative AI revolution. **This collaboration offers strategic, reputational, and operational advantages, aligning the incubator with a pan-European initiative that seeks to redefine the future of AI-driven innovation and technological leadership.**

The VIP programme will select one incubator to run a **12-week VIP cohort across Europe,** which will:
- Deliver structured training and mentoring to 30 startups.
- Provide and facilitate access to technical expertise and AI infrastructures.
- Monitor and report progress using standardised KPIs defined in the Annex I.
- Contribute to the overall impact of LLM-BRIDGE and the European GenAI innovation ecosystem.

The selected incubator will gain direct access to a carefully selected pipeline of high-potential GenAI startups from across Europe, allowing it to deepen its expertise in nurturing deep-tech ventures with the potential to drive the next wave of generative AI solutions. Such engagement not only enhances the incubators reputation as a leading enabler of cutting-edge innovation but also strengthens its market position within the highly competitive AI ecosystem.

In addition, through its integration into the LLM-BRIDGE ecosystem, the participating incubator will have the opportunity to gain access to a network of Europe's most influential stakeholders, including ALT-EDIC, 28DIGITAL, ADRA, national AI coalitions, and prominent

HPC providers. This facilitates long-term partnerships with investors, policymakers, and industry leaders, amplifying the incubators capacity to offer enriched support to its startups. The opportunity to collaborate with these entities fosters synergies that extend far beyond the immediate programme, reinforcing the incubators influence in Europe's digital innovation landscape. The partnership will also provide access to state-of-the-art resources and methodologies developed under the LLM-BRIDGE initiative ensuring that the participating incubator remains at the cutting edge of entrepreneurial support for AI ventures, providing their startups with a critical competitive edge.

Finally, the association with LLM-BRIDGE and its focus on long-term sustainability ensures that the incubator becomes integral to a larger framework of European GenAI innovation instead of a mere service provider, which brings significant added value in creating a legacy that will resonate across the evolving landscape of AI and digital transformation in Europe.

3. Scope of the Call

This call aims to select an incubator or an innovation partner[4] to implement and deliver the LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme (VIP): a structured, 12-week incubation framework designed to support early-stage startups working with LLMs and GenAI technologies.

3.1 Activities Covered by the Call

The selected incubator will be responsible for designing and delivering a comprehensive incubation process that:

- Implements the Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) in line with the framework defined in this call document and its Annexes.
- Supports early-stage GenAI ventures in refining their business models, validating technical solutions, and achieving product-market fit.
- Provides structured mentoring and coaching, delivered by a network of experts in entrepreneurship, AI, and digital technologies.
- Facilitates access to technical resources, including data spaces, LLM models, and high-performance computing (HPC) infrastructures Guides startups on regulatory and ethical compliance, particularly regarding the AI Act, GDPR, Data Act, and Green Deal obligations.
- Collaborates on the organisation and management of the Demo Day, where startups present their Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) to investors, mentors, and industry stakeholders.
- Monitors and reports progress using KPIs defined in the LLM-BRIDGE performance framework (Annex I)
- The incubator must ensure that its activities contribute to the LLM-BRIDGE strategic outcomes, namely:

    o **Supporting the growth of up to 30 startups**
    o **Strengthening the European GenAI innovation capacity, and**
    o **Promoting the development of ethical, multilingual, and culturally adaptive AI systems.**

3.2 Duration and Cohort Structure

The selected incubator will deliver one incubation programme of up to 30 startups during the project implementation period.
The incubation programme will last 12 weeks and include structured mentoring, training sessions, business development support, and access to LLM-specific technical resources.
It is scheduled to start in June 2026, following contracting and onboarding.

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[4] *Innovation partners include incubators, accelerators, university entrepreneurship centres, university TTOs, venture builders, industry associations, science and tech parks, VC funds or similar organizations with capacity and expertise to support the program delivery.*

3.3 Geographical and Operational Coverage

The call is open to incubators established in EU Member States and countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme[5].

Activities may be conducted onsite, online, or hybrid, ensuring accessibility for startups across Europe.

The incubator selected is expected to foster cross-border participation, engage with under-represented regions and groups, and strive towards gender balance and diversity among participants and mentors.

3.4 Expected Deliverables

The selected incubator will be expected to:

- Provide progress and final reports, including quantitative and qualitative outcomes.
- Organise the LLM-BRIDGE's Demo Day and contribute to follow-up initiatives such as the Long Jump.
- Supply data for the consortium's impact reporting to the European Commission, including success stories and KPI metrics.

4. Role and Responsibilities of the Selected Incubator

The incubator will be responsible for:

• **Programme Delivery**: Execute the 12-week incubation cycle in close coordination with the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium. This includes onboarding, weekly mentoring sessions, interim evaluations, and participation in the final Demo Day.

• **Mentoring and Capacity Building**: Provide access to a multidisciplinary pool of mentors, business advisors, and AI technical experts who can guide startups through product validation, compliance with EU data and AI regulations, and investor readiness preparations.

• **Curriculum Integration:** Deliver modules covering entrepreneurial mindset, market positioning, user testing, ethical AI design, legal frameworks (AI Act, GDPR, Data Act), and sustainable business models. The incubator may have to adapt the content according to startup needs while adhering to the LLM-BRIDGE common framework.

• **Monitoring and Reporting:** Track progress against predefined milestones, collect qualitative and quantitative indicators (e.g. MVP development, market validation, funding readiness), and contribute to consolidated reports for the European Commission under FSTP monitoring rules.

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[5] *DIGITAL-2024-BESTUSE-07: Accelerating the best use of technologies*

- **Ecosystem Engagement**: Facilitate connections between startups, research institutions, investors, and industrial partners to foster collaboration and post-programme continuity. Encourage applications for participation in LLM-BRIDGE's follow-up pathways such as the Long Jump, and the European Grand Challenges.

- **Data and Ethics Compliance:** Ensure all supported startups follow ethical AI practices, data protection principles, and the European approach to trustworthy AI and EU legislation.

- **Visibility and Dissemination:** Promote the LLM-BRIDGE project through communication channels, events, and digital platforms, highlighting its contribution to Europe's AI sovereignty and innovation ecosystem.

The incubator is recommended to designate a **Programme Manager** responsible for operational coordination, reporting, and communication with the consortium's management, to ensure alignment with programme objectives, adherence to deadlines, and standardised delivery across participating startups.

5. Funding Conditions

5.1 Purpose

The funding is provided to enable the incubator to design and implement the 12-week incubation cycle supporting early-stage ventures in GenAI and Large LLMs.
The funding will be used to cover mentoring, training, coordination, reporting, and the organisation of on-boarding, interim reviews, and Demo Day activities, following the framework set out in this call document and its Annexes.

5.2 Form and Structure

Financial support is granted as a **fixed-amount contribution tied to verified milestones and deliverables.** The incubator will need to sign a Financial Support Agreement defining objectives, activities, budget ceiling, and reporting requirements.

Payments are performance-based and released in two stages, as is explained in table 1.

Table 1. VIP Programme payments share and triggers

Stage	Trigger	Payment Share	Description
1.Initial Payment	Contract signature and approved implementation plan	40 %	Pre-financing to initiate and deliver the incubation cycle.
2.Final Payment	Completion of all activities and acceptance of final report	60 %	Released after verification of results by the consortium.

5.3 Compliance

Incubators must ensure compliance with applicable EU legislation, such as the AI Act, GDPR, Data Act, and maintain proper documentation for audit and verification. (*See Section 8 for further information*)

5.4 Reporting and Visibility

The incubator will need to submit an on-boarding plan and a final report detailing activities, KPIs, and outcomes. The consortium will consolidate the results into the project-level FSTP reporting to the European Commission. All communication and training materials must display the **EU emblem** and the statement **"Co-funded by the European Union"**, in accordance with section 9 below.

6. Eligibility & Selection Criteria

6.1 Eligibility criteria

• Applicants must be legally established in a European Union Member State or Digital Europe Associated Countries and possess demonstrable experience in incubating startups in deep-tech sectors, particularly within the fields of Generative AI and Natural Language Processing.

• Applicants must demonstrate the operational capacity to deliver one intensive 12-week incubation programme, including access to experienced mentors, facilities, networks, and digital infrastructure. The ability to customise services while ensuring consistency with programme KPIs is essential.

• Applicants may receive co-funding from other EU or national programmes, provided there is no double funding (i.e. the same activity and costs are not financed twice). Applicants must confirm that any co-funded activities are distinct and clearly separable from those supported under LLM-BRIDGE, and that their involvement in LLM-BRIDGE provides clear complementary added value

• The proposal must be submitted in English with a guarantee that the incubation programme will be delivered in English to ensure consistent evaluation and delivery to an international start-up cohort.

6.2 Selection criteria

The selection criteria aim to identify an incubator with a proven capacity to support early-stage ventures in the GenAI and NLP domains, ensuring alignment with the project's overarching goals of fostering European AI sovereignty.

These criteria are:

- Proven experience in early-stage incubation to mitigate risks associated with suboptimal support and guarantee that startups will benefit from advanced methodologies and frameworks.

- Multidisciplinary capacity demonstrating their ability to manage diverse teams spanning technical, business, and regulatory dimensions, addressing the complexity inherent in the GenAI sector.

- Regional reach and ecosystem engagement in order to ensure geographical diversity, promoting synergies across Europe's innovation landscape.

- Alignment with GenAI priorities and ethical standards, including adherence to ethical AI principles, GDPR compliance, and sustainability practices.

6.3 Scoring and Evaluation process

The scoring and evaluation process delve deeper into the ability of the incubators to deliver measurable value, ensuring only the most capable organisation is chosen. The evaluation will focus on the Relevance (*See Annex C, Section C2 for a detailed description of the evaluation criteria scores*), and will include other key dimensions such as:

- Track record of success to ensure a foundation of expertise and credibility and establish trust among the startups selected for the VIP, knowing they will receive high-quality support.

- Networks and strategic connections underlining the consortium's commitment to comprehensive support that extends beyond the core programme and ensuring that startups not only gain technical and business guidance but also establish meaningful relationships that accelerate their growth.

- Adaptability and responsiveness to meet evolving needs and thus ensuring that the programme will remain relevant in the rapidly shifting AI landscape.

- The inclusion of progress monitoring frameworks underscores the consortium's emphasis on accountability and measurable impact. The incubator is expected to operate with transparency, offering clear metrics that showcase startup development and programme success.

- Regional diversity and ecosystem leverage which demonstrate that the incubator has the capacity to contribute to a geographically balanced programme, leveraging local strengths while maintaining cohesion within the pan-European framework.

Each criterion will be rated with the maximum achievable score being 42. Proposals must meet the threshold for each criterion to qualify for selection as indicated in table 3 Annex C. The evaluation process will follow a structured three-step approach:

1. Independent experts will assess proposals, submitting signed evaluation forms for their assigned applications.

2. Evaluators will convene to reconcile scores and agree on a unified evaluation report for each proposal. Where needed, remote interviews with applicants may be conducted to clarify specific aspects of their submissions.

3. A panel of evaluators will review, and rank proposals based on total scores. In the event of identical overall scores, priority will be given to applicants achieving higher scores in the highest-weighted criteria. Should a tie persist, interview performance will be used as the final tie-breaking factor.

To ensure flexibility, a reserve list of high-ranking proposals will be maintained, enabling replacements if the selected incubator cannot meet contractual requirements. If submission quality is insufficient, the evaluation committee reserves the right to reopen the call. Applicants will receive detailed feedback through evaluation summaries, with unsuccessful candidates offered a redress mechanism to address procedural shortcomings with significant impact on their scores.

7. Redress and Complaint Procedure

The LLM-BRIDGE consortium will, in good faith, address any potential disputes related to the evaluation and selection process described in this document.
If an applicant believes that a procedural error or irregularity occurred during the evaluation, they may submit a formal redress request. Redress requests must be based on factual evidence of procedural error and not on disagreement with the evaluators' judgement or scores.

7.1 Process for Submitting a Redress Request

Timing

Requests must be submitted within ten (10) working days from the date of notification of results (rejection letter in case of non-eligibility or the Evaluation Summary Report for evaluated proposals).

Grounds for Redress

Requests must clearly identify the specific procedural error or inconsistency that allegedly occurred during the evaluation.
Only claims demonstrating that a failure to follow published procedures may have materially affected the outcome will be considered.

Disagreements with evaluation results, individual scores, or funding decisions will not be considered valid grounds.

Format and Submission.

The request must be submitted electronically to: llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line *"Redress Request – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]".*
It must include:
- Applicant's legal name and contact information
- Reference number of the application
- Clear description of the alleged procedural error
- Supporting evidence (if applicable)

7.2 Internal Review and Re-Evaluation

Upon receipt, the LLM-BRIDGE Open Call Management Team (OCMT) will acknowledge the request within two (2) working days.

The OCMT will establish an Internal Review Committee, independent of the original evaluation, to examine the complaint.

The committee will assess whether a procedural breach occurred and whether it could have materially influenced the evaluation outcome.

If the committee confirms a valid procedural error, the proposal—or relevant parts of it—may be re-evaluated by a new set of independent experts.

The OCMT will communicate the outcome of the redress review to the applicant within ten (10) working days after receiving the request.

7.3 Final Decision

The decision of the Internal Review Committee is final and will be recorded for audit purposes. 28DIGITAL acting as the contracting authority for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP), reserves the right to apply corrective actions if necessary, including re-ranking or adjustment of the final list.

The consortium reserves the right to make justified exceptions to this procedure on a case-by-case basis where necessary to preserve fairness, transparency, or compliance with EU funding rules.

8. Data Protection, Ethics, and Compliance

8.1 General Principles

All activities and data-processing operations carried out under this call must comply with the applicable European Union legislation, such as:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.
- Regulation (EU) 2023/2854 (AI Act) and Regulation (EU) 2023/2853 (Data Act), where applicable.
- Relevant provisions[6] of the EU Grants Model Grant Agreement applicable to the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) and the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) framework.

8.2 Data Processing and Confidentiality

All personal data collected during the call process will be processed solely for evaluation, contracting, implementation, and reporting purposes in accordance with GDPR principles of lawfulness, fairness, and transparency.

Data will be stored securely and retained only for the duration required to meet contractual and audit obligations under the Grant Agreement.

Access to submitted information will be strictly limited to authorised members of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium, the European Commission, and independent evaluators bound by confidentiality agreements.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all personal data contained in their proposals are shared in compliance with GDPR and that they have obtained necessary consents from data subjects.

8.3 Ethics and Responsible AI Conduct

The selected incubator must:

- Uphold the highest ethical standards in all programme-related activities.
- Ensure that AI-based methodologies comply with the principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight, and non-discrimination as defined in EU law.
- Implement data-governance practices aligned with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and trustworthy AI guidelines.
- Guarantee that all startups supported within their programmes follow the same ethical and legal standards regarding data, privacy, and algorithmic fairness.

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[6] *Articles 14 (ethics and values) and Article 15 (data protection)* https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/agr-contr/unit-mga_he_v1.1_en.pdf

8.4 Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

All information and documentation submitted in the context of the call are considered confidential and may not be disclosed to third parties without prior written consent from the applicant.

Ownership of the results and methodologies developed by incubators remains with the respective organisations.

8.5 Data Controller and Contact

28DIGITAL acts as the Data Controller for all personal data collected through the open call. For any inquiries regarding data processing or privacy rights, applicants may contact: llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Data Controller Inquiry – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]".*

9. Communication and Visibility Requirements

9.1 EU Visibility Obligations

Each incubator must:
- Display the European Union emblem and include the accompanying acknowledgement text on all materials, websites, and digital content related to the funded activities:
  > *"Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission."*
- Include the LLM-BRIDGE logo on all public-facing materials, ensuring clear and consistent co-branding with the European Union emblem.
- Acknowledge EU support in all press releases, presentations, publications, and events connected to the incubator's participation in the programme.
- Use the official graphic templates and brand guidelines provided by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

Failure to observe these visibility requirements may lead to suspension of payments or recovery of funds, in accordance with the Financial Support Agreement.

9.2 Dissemination and Outreach

The funded incubator is expected to:

- Participate in joint dissemination and communication activities organised by the consortium, including the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day and related EU-level events or ALT-EDIC events.
- Promote the objectives and results of the Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) within their regional and national ecosystems.
- Submit concise activity updates, outreach metrics, and examples of media coverage as part of progress and final reports.

- Contribute actively to visibility actions coordinated by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium and the European Commission.
- Cooperate with the Consortium in preparing shared success stories and impact publications for submission to the European Commission.

9.3 Compliance and Sanctions

Failure to comply with visibility or dissemination obligations may result in:

- Suspension or reduction of payments. Ineligibility for future participation in LLM-BRIDGE open calls; and
- Reporting of non-compliance to the European Commission as part of the project's periodic audit and monitoring process.

10. Timeline

The LLM-BRIDGE consortium launches the first VIP open call on 19th of January 2026 with submission deadline on 20th of March 2026.

10.1 Indicative Timeline

Table 2. VIP Milestones and Timeline

Milestone	Indicative Date	Description
Call Publication	20 January 2026	Official launch of the LLM-BRIDGE Open Call for Incubators on the ALT-EDIC platform and EC Funding & Tenders Portal.
Call Opening for Submissions	20 January 2026	Online submission system becomes active; templates and guidance available on the project website.
Submission Deadline	23 March2026	Call closes (minimum 60 calendar days after publication). Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.
Evaluation Period	until April 2026	Eligibility check, independent review, consensus, and panel ranking.
Notification of Results	May 2026	Selected incubator notified by email with Evaluation Summary Report.
Contract Signature	June 2026	Financial Support Agreement signed between selected incubator and 28DIGITAL.
Programme Kick-off	June 2026	On-boarding and start of implementation activities
Mid-term Review	September 2026	Monitoring of progress and verification of milestone delivery.
Final Review & Demo Day	December 2026	Completion of activities, final reporting, and participation in the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day event.

In the event of any updates to the call, all applicants will be directly informed. Additionally, a public announcement will be prominently displayed at the top of the call website in red to ensure visibility for all potential applicants.

10.2   Contact Information

LLM-BRIDGE Open Call Helpdesk llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Open Call Helpdesk – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*".

For questions regarding the submission process, eligibility, or evaluation procedure, please contact the Helpdesk before the call deadline.
Queries submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Annex A - Structure of the Venture Incubation Programme

A detailed description of the LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme, its objectives, and the role of the selected incubator can be found in Sections 1 and 2 of this document.

A.1 Financial Support to Third Parties

The selected incubator will receive a fixed lump-sum contribution of up to **EUR 60 000**, allocated to deliver the defined incubation activities.

The payment schedule is as follows:

- Stage 1 – 40 % upon signature of the Financial Support Agreement and approval of the implementation plan.

- Stage 2 – 60 % after acceptance of the final report and validation of KPIs by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

All payments are contingent on successful completion of agreed milestones and verification of deliverables.

A.2 Programme Structure

The Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) is organised in three cohorts, i.e. there will be two more calls for the selection of other two incubators to run the other VIP programmes, each lasting 12 weeks. Each programme will have the following four phases:

Onboarding Phase – Orientation of startups to objectives, expectations, and methodology.

Acceleration Phase – Tailored mentoring and business development in GenAI, model design, ethics, regulation, and fundraising.

Demo Day & Evaluation – Presentation of outcomes to investors and experts; assessment against predefined KPIs.

Reporting Phase – Submission of activity reports and performance evidence to the Consortium.

Each cohort will include a maximum number of startups as defined in the specific call round. The programme may be adjusted to reflect evolving priorities of the DEP or European Commission guidance.

A.3 Eligibility and Application Conditions

Applicants must meet all the following eligibility requirements:

- Be a legal entity established in an EU Member State or Digital Europe Associated Country.
- Have at least three years of experience in startup incubation or acceleration, preferably in AI, NLP, or deep-tech sectors.
- Demonstrate operational and financial capacity to conduct 12-week incubation cycles and manage multiple startups.
- Provide access to qualified mentors, facilities, and networks.
- Ensure compliance with EU data-protection, ethics, and funding regulations.
- Submit a maximum of one complete proposal per applicant per call, using the official templates that the LLM-BRIDGE consortium will provide to the applicants. *(See Annex H4)*

Proposals that do not comply with eligibility conditions will not proceed to evaluation.

A.4 Expected Outcomes

The funded incubator is expected to:

- Support early-stage startups to achieve measurable progress (MVP validation, market entry, fundraising).
- Deliver structured mentoring, training, and ecosystem engagement in line with the VIP framework.
- Demonstrate integration of responsible AI and regulatory-compliance principles.
- Participate in the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day and EU dissemination activities.

A.5 Submission Requirements

Proposals must be submitted electronically via the ALT-EDIC submission platform (accessible through the LLM-BRIDGE website, https://www.llm-bridge.eu).
No paper or email submissions will be accepted.

Annex B - Application and Evaluation Process

B.1 Call Publication and Submission Platform

The LLM-BRIDGE Open Call for Incubators will be published on:

- the LLM-BRIDGE website https://www.llm-bridge.eu ,
- the European Commission Funding and Tenders Portal, and
- additional partner communication channels.

Each applicant must:

- Register an account on the platform.
- Complete the online application form and upload the following required documents:
    - Completed template available in Annex H4
- Submit the proposal before the deadline (17:00 CET on the final day of the submission period).

B.2 Eligibility Check

After the submission deadline, the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium will verify administrative and eligibility criteria as described in Annex A.6. Applications failing to meet eligibility requirements will be declared ineligible and excluded from further evaluation. Applicants will be notified of ineligibility via email within ten working days after closure of the call.

B.3 Evaluation Process

Eligible proposals will be evaluated by independent external experts, appointed by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium, to ensure objectivity and impartiality.

Each proposal will be assessed by at least two experts using the criteria and scoring system defined in Annex C: Evaluation Criteria.

The evaluation follows three phases:

- Independent Review – Each expert assesses proposals individually and submits a signed evaluation form through the secure platform.
- Consensus Meeting – Experts for each proposal discuss scores and comments to produce a unified consensus report and final score. If necessary, remote clarification meetings with applicants may be conducted.
- Panel Ranking – A panel composed of senior evaluators and representatives of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium reviews all consensus reports and establishes the final ranking list based on total scores and thresholds.

In the event of tied scores, priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate:

- stronger alignment with LLM-BRIDGE objectives,

- greater innovation and scalability potential, and
- team diversity and gender balance.

B.4 Evaluation Outcomes and Notification

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium will validate the ranking list and approve the proposal recommended for funding.

Applicants will be notified of the evaluation results within four weeks after completion of the panel ranking.

Each applicant will receive an Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) containing individual scores, comments, and the final consensus assessment.

The successful applicant will be invited to sign a Financial Support Agreement with 28DIGITAL on behalf of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

B.5 Redress Procedure

Only procedural errors may be appealed. The full procedure is described in Section 7 **B.6 Reserve List and Re-Opening of Call**

A reserve list may be used if the selected incubator cannot complete contracting.

B.7 Communication with Applicants

All official communications will be conducted via email through the address provided in the application form. The successful applicant will receive instructions for contract signature and onboarding. Unsuccessful applicants will receive formal feedback and may re-apply in future call rounds.

Annex C - Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Grid

C.1 Evaluation Principles

All eligible proposals are evaluated by at least two independent external experts. Each criterion is scored from 0 up to its maximum (10, 8, 6 or 5). Table 3 shows how qualitative levels correspond to the different scoring scales. In all cases, the maximum score corresponds to 'Excellent', and the threshold is aligned with the 'Good' level

Table 3. Criterion Scores

Qualitative level	Score (max 10)	Score (max 8)	Score (max 5/6)	Description
Not addressed	0	0	0	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed.
Poor	1-2	1-2	1	Serious weaknesses or lack of required detail.
Fair	3-4	3-4	2	Some strengths but significant weaknesses remain
Good (***threshold level***)	**5-6**	**5**	**3-4**	**Criterion adequately addressed with moderate weaknesses.**
Very good	7-8	6-7	4-5	Criterion well addressed, only minor shortcomings.
Excellent	9-10	8	5-6	Criterion fully addressed; outstanding quality with no or negligible weaknesses.

Threshold per criterion: 3 to 6 points. Overall minimum score: 26 points (out of 42). Maximum total score: 42 points. Proposals failing to reach the threshold in any criterion or the overall minimum score will not be considered for funding.

C.2 Evaluation Criteria

Table 4. Evaluation criteria

Criterion	Description	Maximum Score	Threshold
Relevance	Alignment of the proposal with the LLM-BRIDGE objectives, including the ability to support early-stage GenAI startups and foster EU GenAI goals.	10	6
Track record	Proven experience in incubating and scaling AI or deep-tech ventures, with demonstrated outcomes in terms of startup growth and innovation.	8	5
Networks and access	Capacity to provide startups with access to mentors, investors, and strategic industry connections that enhance their market potential.	8	5
Adaptability	Evidence of flexibility and ability to address emerging technological and market needs, particularly in the dynamic GenAI sector.	6	4
Monitoring framework	Establishment and documentation of processes for tracking and reporting mechanisms necessary for evaluating startup progress and programme success, with clearly defined metrics.	5	3
Cost effectiveness	Appropriateness and justification of the proposed budget, ensuring value for money and resource	5	3

C.3 Consensus and Ranking

After individual evaluations, experts reach a consensus score for each proposal. A Panel Meeting consolidates all consensus reports and produces the final ranked list of proposals recommended for funding. In case of tied scores, the following tie-break criteria will apply sequentially:

Higher score in C1 – Relevance.

Higher score in C2 – Track Record.

Higher score in C3 – Networks and Access.

Gender balance and team diversity.

Pan-European coverage of the incubator's activities.

C.4 Evaluation Documentation

All evaluators sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality (Annex H) before accessing proposals.

Evaluation results are documented in:

- Individual Evaluation Forms (IEF).
- Consensus Reports (CR).
- Panel Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

All records are stored by 28DIGITAL on behalf the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium for audit and reporting in compliance with the Digital Europe Programme requirements.

C.6 Approval and Communication of Results

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium approves the final ranking list and communicates results to applicants, as described in Annex B.4. The successful incubator proceeds to contracting; unsuccessful applicants receive their ESR and may request redress under Annex B.5.

Annex D - Financial Support Conditions

D.1 Legal Basis

Financial support to third parties is provided under the agreement between the LLM-BRIDGE consortium and the EC[7].

This mechanism enables the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium to allocate funding to eligible incubators for implementing the *Venture Incubation Programme (VIP)* in full compliance with the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) rules on transparency, fairness, and accountability.

D.2 Funding Type and Amount

The selected incubator will receive a fixed lump-sum contribution of up to **EUR 60 000**, calculated on the basis of predefined activities and measurable outcomes. The lump-sum value must be used to cover costs related to staff, mentoring, management, infrastructure, travel, communication, and reporting required to deliver the 12-week VIP.

No additional or indirect cost reimbursement is provided.

Co-funding is not mandatory but may be indicated to demonstrate additional commitment or leverage.

D.3 Payment Schedule

Payments[8] will be released in two instalments:

Stage	Payment Share	Condition for Release
Stage 1 – Initial Payment	40 %	Signature of the Financial Support Agreement and approval of the implementation plan and onboarding schedule by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.
Stage 2 – Final Payment	60 %	Submission and approval of the final technical and financial reports demonstrating successful completion of activities and achievement of KPI targets.

D.4 Eligible Activities

Funded activities must directly contribute to the objectives of the *Venture Incubation Programme (VIP)*, including:

- Mentoring and training for startups participating in the LLM-BRIDGE programme.
- Organisation and delivery of incubation modules in GenAI and LLM domains.
- Access to technical resources and specialist advisory services.

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[7] *LLM-BRIDGE Grant Agreement Article 6.2 D.1Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) within Work Package 3.*
[8] *Payments are executed via bank transfer to the incubator's account specified in the Financial Support Agreement and subject to all consortium and EU financial controls.*

- Monitoring and reporting on startup performance and programme outcomes.
- Participation in the Demo Day and EU-level dissemination events.

Any activities not included in the approved implementation plan or already funded through other public grants are ineligible.

D.5 Reporting and Verification Requirements

The incubator must provide two reports:

1. Summary Report – midway through the incubation cycle, describing progress, mentoring sessions delivered, and preliminary KPIs.
2. Final Report – upon programme completion, including a summary of results, impact metrics, financial statement (usage of lump sum per task), and visibility evidence.

Reports are submitted via the official submission platform and reviewed by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium for completeness and accuracy. Additional verification or clarification may be requested prior to final approval.

D.6 Monitoring and Audit

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium and the European Commission reserve the right to:

- Conduct document-based or on-site audits.
- Verify that activities correspond to approved plans.
- Request clarifications or corrective actions before final payment.

All financial records, contracts, and supporting evidence must be retained for five (5) years after the final payment, in accordance with DEP audit rules.[9]

D.7 Suspension or Recovery of Funds

The Consortium may suspend or recover disbursed funds if:

- Activities are not implemented as approved.
- Reports are incomplete or falsified.
- Visibility or ethics requirements are breached; or
- The incubator fails to meet contractual obligations.

Amounts to be recovered will be calculated pro rata based on validated deliverables and actual progress

The programmes will be run under the Funding Condition: this collaboration is contingent upon receiving funding from the European Commission (EC). If the necessary funding is not secured, 28DIGITAL reserves the right to delay, modify, or cancel any collaboration

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[9] *The incubator must keep all relevant information relating to the action (including complete accounts, individual salary statements or other personal data), at least until 5 years until the project ends.*

agreements. Furthermore, 28DIGITAL may adjust agreements based on changes in circumstances or the availability of funding.

Annex E - Communication, Dissemination and Visibility

E.1 Data and Publication Rights

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium and the European Commission may publish non-confidential information about the funded incubator (name, country, funding amount, and project summary) for transparency and reporting purposes.

The incubator must ensure that any publications or media content referencing LLM-BRIDGE respect confidentiality, data-protection obligations, and intellectual-property rights (see Annex F).

E.2 Monitoring of Compliance

The Consortium will verify visibility and dissemination compliance during periodic reviews and the final reporting phase. Non-compliance may result in:
- Withholding of pending payments.
- Reduction of the final contribution; or
- Ineligibility to participate in subsequent LLM-BRIDGE open calls.

Annex F - Data Protection, Ethics and Compliance

F.1 Legal Basis

This Annex establishes the principles and procedures for ensuring compliance with:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).
- Directive (EU) 2016/680 on data processing for law enforcement (where applicable).
- AI Act provisions relevant to responsible AI development; and
- The action must be carried out in line with the highest ethical standards and the applicable EU, international and national law on ethical principles.

All activities and data processing conducted under this call must conform to these frameworks and the Digital Europe Programme's ethical standards.

F.2 Data Protection Responsibilities

28DIGITAL will acts as the Data Controller for all data collected through the open call platform, evaluation process, and reporting systems.
Data are processed solely for the following purposes:

- Managing the open call, evaluation, and contracting processes.
- Monitoring the implementation of the VIP; and
- Reporting aggregated outcomes to the European Commission.

   Personal data collected include names, contact details, professional information, and relevant organisational data of applicants, mentors, and evaluators.

Processing of the data will comply with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[10]

All data will be stored securely within the EU and retained for a maximum period of five (5) years after the end of the project, in line with audit and verification requirements.

F.3 Rights of Data Subjects

Applicants and evaluators have the right to:

- Access their personal data.
- Request rectification of inaccurate or incomplete information.
- Request erasure or restriction of processing (subject to legal constraints).
- Object to processing on legitimate grounds.

Any request must be addressed in writing to:

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[10] *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679*

llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Privacy – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*". The Consortium will respond within 30 calendar days of receiving a valid request. Complaints regarding data protection may be lodged with the relevant national Data Protection Authority (DPA).

F.4 Confidentiality and Security

All information exchanged during the application, evaluation, and implementation phases is treated as confidential. Access to applications, evaluation reports, and project data is restricted to authorised personnel bound by confidentiality obligations.

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium will implement appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure:

- Secure data storage and encrypted communications.
- Controlled access with audit trails.
- Prevention of unauthorised disclosure or loss of information.

All third-party service providers (e.g. platform operators, cloud providers) must comply with GDPR and relevant EU data-protection standards.

F.5 Ethical Standards

The funded incubator and its supported startups must ensure that all activities:

- Promote human-centric, transparent, and explainable AI.
- Prevent bias, discrimination, or misuse of personal data.
- Respect the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- Apply best practices in sustainability, inclusion, and data integrity.

The incubator must report any ethical issue or potential breach to the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium via llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Ethics – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*", as soon as the issue is identified.

F.6 Compliance Monitoring and Sanctions

Non-compliance with data protection and ethical standards throughout the implementation period may result in suspension or reduction of payments; Exclusion from further participation in the programme; Reporting to the European Commission for contractual measures.

Annex G - Contracting and Monitoring Procedures

G.1 Contracting Framework

Selected incubators will formalise their participation in the *LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme (VIP)* by signing a Financial Support Agreement with 28DIGITAL. This agreement establishes the financial, technical, ethical, and reporting obligations of both parties and governs the transfer of funds under the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism. Before signature, selected incubators must provide:

- Legal entity documentation (registration certificate, VAT number, bank details).
- Declaration of Honour confirming absence of conflict of interest or double funding.
- Updated implementation plan and activity calendar consistent with the approved proposal.

TPAs must be signed within 15 calendar days of notification of selection. Failure to sign within this period may result in reallocation of funding to another applicant from the reserve list.

G.2 Onboarding and Kick-Off

Following contract signature, the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium will organise a Kick-off and Onboarding Session to:

- Present the programme's technical, financial, and reporting requirements.
- Align the incubator on common mentoring standards, ethical-AI principles, and data-compliance procedures.
- Introduce communication templates, KPI tracking tools, and the LLM-BRIDGE reporting portal[11].

Attendance at the onboarding session is mandatory for the incubators designated Programme Manager.

G.3 Implementation and Monitoring

The Incubator will implement its assigned 12-week incubation cohort according to the work plan approved in the Financial Support Agreement. Throughout this period, the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium will perform technical and administrative monitoring based on the following procedures:

1. Progress Tracking – Regular reporting of mentoring sessions, startup KPIs, and training hours through the online reporting platform.
2. Mid-Term Review – Optional remote review session held midway through the incubation cycle to assess progress against milestones and provide corrective guidance if necessary.
3. Final Review – Conducted at the end of the incubation phase to validate deliverables, evaluate performance, and confirm eligibility for the final payment instalment.

All monitoring follows the principles of transparency, proportionality, and equal treatment.

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[11] *Accessible through LLM-BRIDGE's website, https://www.llm-bridge.eu*

G.4 Deliverables and Milestones

Each incubator must submit deliverables as defined in the TPA, including:

Table 5. Deliverable Timeline for the incubators

Deliverable	Description	Deadline
D1 – Onboarding Plan	Detailed implementation plan including timeline, mentor allocation, and participant list.	At signature (M0)
D2 – Summary Report	Summary of progress, mentoring activities, and preliminary results.	M6 after signature
D3 – Final Report	Comprehensive report of outcomes, KPIs achieved, and supporting evidence.	M12 after signature

Verification of deliverables determines release of payments according to Annex D.3.

G.5 Audits and Verification

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium and the European Commission retain the right to perform audits and inspections at any stage during or after implementation.
Audits may include:
- Review of submitted deliverables and supporting documentation.
- Verification of compliance with data protection, visibility, and ethics requirements.
- Financial review of bank records related to FSTP disbursements.

Incubators must retain all relevant records for a minimum of five (5) years after final payment.

G.6 Amendment and Termination

28DIGITAL may agree to amend the TPA upon justified request by the incubator, provided the modification:
- Does not affect eligibility conditions or core objectives; and
- Receives approval from the Consortium before implementation.

The Consortium may terminate the agreement and recover disbursed funds if:
- Activities are not carried out as agreed.
- Reports or deliverables are not submitted within deadlines.
- Ethical or data-protection breaches occur; or
- False information was provided in the application process.

G.7 Communication of Results and Closure

At the end of the programme, the Consortium will:
- Consolidate final reports and outcomes for submission to the European Commission.
- Publish anonymised success indicators and non-confidential summaries on the project website (https://www.llm-bridge.eu)
- Issue a formal closure letter and a completion certificate to the incubator.

Final approval of deliverables by the 28DIGITAL constitutes closure of the contractual obligations under the TPA.

Annex H - Templates and Declaration Forms

H.1 Declaration of Honour

Call: LLM-BRIDGE Open Call for Incubators

Applicant organisation: *[Name of applicant entity]*
Legal representative: *[Full name and position]*

I, the undersigned, hereby declare on behalf of the applicant organisation that:
1. The information provided in the application is true, complete, and accurate to the best of my knowledge.
2. The organisation:
    o is a legally established entity in an EU Member State or Digital Europe Associated Country.
    o has not been declared bankrupt, is not under insolvency or liquidation proceedings, and is financially stable.
    o is not in a conflict of interest with the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium or its partners.
    o is not receiving duplicate funding for the same activities from any other EU or national programme.
    o complies with the ethical, environmental, and social principles of the European Union.
3. The organisation commits to:
    o implement the Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) activities in accordance with the approved work plan and the Financial Support Agreement.
    o comply with all data-protection, ethical-AI, and reporting requirements stated in the Call document.
    o display the EU and LLM-BRIDGE logos and acknowledgement text on all communication materials as set out in Annex E.
    o

I understand that any false declaration or failure to fulfil the obligations outlined above may result in termination of the agreement and recovery of funds disbursed.

Signed in *[City]* on *[Date]*

Signature: _____

Name of legal representative: _____

Position: _____

Organisation seal (if applicable)

H.2 GDPR Consent Form

Call: LLM-BRIDGE Open Call for Incubators
Applicant organisation: *[Name of applicant entity]*
Contact person: *[Name – Email – Phone number]*

By signing this form, the applicant confirms that:

1. They have read and understood the Data Protection and Privacy Policy set out in Annex F of this Call document.
2. They consent to the processing of their personal and organisational data by 28DIGITAL solely for the purposes of:
   o managing the application, evaluation, and selection process of this open call.
   o preparing the Financial Support Agreement and processing related payments; and
   o reporting aggregated programme outcomes to the European Commission.
3. They understand that their personal data will be stored securely within the EU for no longer than five (5) years after the project end date and may be audited by the European Commission or its authorised representatives.

They retain the right to access, rectify, erase, or restrict the processing of their data by contacting the Data Protection Officer at 28DIGITAL, llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Data Controller Inquiry – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*".

Signed in *[City]* on *[Date]*
Signature: _____
Name of authorised representative: _____
Position: _____

H.3 Reporting Template

Call: LLM-BRIDGE Open Call for Incubators
Reporting Period: ☐ Summary Report (M6)   ☐ Final Report (M12)
Incubator name: [ ]
Programme manager: [ ]
Cohort start / end dates: [ ]

Section 1 – Programme Overview

- Summary of incubation activities conducted during the reporting period (max 500 words).
- List of startups supported and short description of each MVP or project.
- Overview of mentoring sessions, workshops, and training modules.

Section 2 – Performance Indicators

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Comments / Evidence
Startups supported	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Mentoring hours delivered	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Number of mentors involved	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
MVPs validated / pilots completed	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Investment readiness assessments completed	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Visibility and outreach activities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Section 3 – Ethics and Compliance

- Confirmation of compliance with applicable regulatory requirements (including, for instance, the GDPR, the AI Act, the DSA, the Data Act, etc.).
- Description of ethical-AI and data-governance measures applied within the incubation programme.

Section 4 – Communication and Visibility

- Evidence of EU and LLM-BRIDGE logo use (attach samples).
- Press releases, social-media links, and event documentation.

Section 5 – Financial Summary

Activity / Cost Item	Budget (EUR)	Used (EUR)	Remarks / Deliverables linked
Mentoring and training			
Technical support / tools			
Events / Demo Day			
Communication and visibility			
Management / Coordination			
Total Lump Sum	60 000 EUR		

Section 6 – Declaration

I hereby certify that the information provided in this report is accurate and complete, and that the activities have been implemented in accordance with the Financial Support Agreement.

Signature of Programme Manager: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Legal Representative: _____ Date: _____

H.4 Proposal Template

COVER PAGE (MANDATORY)
Applicant Organisation – Legal Name: _____
Legal Form: _____
Country of Establishment: _____
Registration Number / VAT (if applicable): _____
Contact Person (Name, Role): _____
Email Address: _____
Phone (optional): _____
Total Funding Requested (EUR): _____
(Maximum: EUR 60,000)

One-sentence Organisation Profile (max. 30 words): _____

Declarations (tick all):
    ☐ *This proposal is the only submission by the applicant organisation under this call*
    ☐ *No double funding is requested for the same activities*
    ☐ *The applicant organisation agrees to comply with applicable EU rules and ethical standards*
Place, Date, Signature: _____

1. EXCELLENCE

Question 1: Relevance.

Please, explain how your proposal aligns with the objectives of the LLM-BRIDGE project and how your organisation will support early-stage GenAI and LLM startups in contributing to European GenAI goals.

> *Help text:*
> *Describe the concrete activities, expertise, and approach your organisation brings to support early-stage GenAI startups*

> *Answer:*

Question 2: Track Record.

Please describe your organisation's experience in incubating or scaling AI, GenAI, or deep-tech startups, including concrete and measurable outcomes achieved.

> *Help text:*
> *Provide evidence of past performance, such as number of startups supported, incorporation, MVP development, funding raised, or market entry.*

> *Answer:*

2. IMPACT

Question 3: Networks and Access.

Please describe the networks and access your organisation provides to supported startups, including mentors, investors, industry partners, and ecosystem actors, and explain how startups access these in practice.

> *Help text: Focus on the quality and usability of networks and the concrete mechanisms used to connect startups to them.*

> *Answer:*

Question 4: Adaptability.

Please explain how your organisation adapts its programmes or support services to emerging technological, market, or regulatory developments, particularly in the GenAI sector.

> *Help text: Provide concrete examples demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to change.*

Answer:

3. QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF IMPLEMENTATION

Question 5: Monitoring Framework.

Please describe the monitoring and reporting processes your organisation will use to track startup progress and programme performance during the Venture Incubation Programme.

> *Help text:*
> *Explain what is monitored, how often progress is reviewed, and how results are reported.*

Answer:

Question 6: Cost Effectiveness.

Please explain how the proposed budget is structured and how it ensures cost-effective delivery and value for money for the Venture Incubation Programme.

> *Help text:*
> *Describe how resources are allocated and why the budget is appropriate for the proposed activities.*

Answer:

Budget summary

Cost category	Amount (EUR)
Programme management	
Mentoring and experts	
Events and Demo Day	
Reporting and coordination	
Total	≤ 60,000

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Annex I Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Incubators

I.1 Purpose

This annex defines the quantitative and qualitative indicators used to monitor the implementation and impact of incubation activities under the LLM-BRIDGE VIP. KPIs ensure comparability, transparency, and accountability across all incubators participating as Third Parties. Achievement of the agreed KPI thresholds is directly linked to milestone verification and final payment under the 40 % / 60 % funding scheme (see Annex D).

I.2 KPIs (quantitive)

Table 6. Incubators KPIs

Performance Area	Indicator / Definition	Measurement Unit	Target per Cohort	Data Source / Evidence
1. Programme Implementation	• Number of startups incubated within the approved 12-week cycle	Count of active startups	Min. 30	Participant list / attendance records
	• Completion rate of incubated startups reaching Demo Day	% of enrolled startups	≥ 80 %	Demo Day registry / final pitch deck
2. Capacity Building & Mentoring Quality	• Average satisfaction score of startups on mentoring and training (1–5 scale)	Mean score	≥ 4.0	Post-programme survey
3. Innovation & Technical Progress	• Share of startups achieving functional MVP validated by mentors or users	% of startups	≥ 80 %	MVP validation report / prototype demo
4. Market Readiness & Investment Potential	• Startups completing investment-readiness assessment or pitch training	Count	≥ 10	Training attendance list
	• Startups securing investor interest / letters of intent within 6 months post-programme	% of startups	≥ 25 %	Follow-up survey / proof of interest
5. Ecosystem Engagement & Outreach	• Partnership events organised locally (webinars, roundtables, etc.)	Count	≥ 2 per cohort	Event agenda / photos
	• Mentors and partners from industry or academia actively involved	Count	≥ 10	Signed MoUs / participant list
6. Communication & Visibility	• Visibility actions showcasing EU and LLM-BRIDGE branding (press release, social media, etc.)	Count	≥ 3 per cohort	Screenshots / links
	• Compliance with branding rules (EU emblem and acknowledgement text)	% compliance	100 %	Report review by Consortium
7. Reporting & Compliance	• Timely submission of interim and final reports (Annex H.3 template)	% on time	100 %	Submission records
	• Audit-ready documentation available and complete	Qualitative assessment	Compliant	Document checklist by Consortium

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I.3 Qualitative Impact Indicators

In addition to quantitative metrics, qualitative evidence will assess:

- Knowledge transfer effectiveness: quality of technical mentoring, depth of feedback, and entrepreneurial learning outcomes.
- Cross-disciplinary integration: collaboration between AI researchers, engineers, and business developers.
- Diversity and inclusion: participation of women-led startups and under-represented founders.
- Sustainability orientation: incorporation of Green Deal principles and energy-efficient AI solutions.

The incubator will provide a short narrative analysis in the Final Report.

I.4 KPI Verification and Payment Link

Verification of KPI achievement will be conducted during the Final Review.

Stage 1 – Interim Payment (40 %) is released upon successful completion of onboarding, delivery of the onboarding plan (D1), and confirmation of operational readiness.

Stage 2 – Final Payment (60 %) is released only upon validation that:

- ≥ 80 % of the quantitative KPIs are achieved or exceeded; and
- all mandatory compliance requirements (GDPR, branding, reporting) are fulfilled.

Partial performance may lead to pro-rata adjustments, subject to evaluation by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

I.5 Audit and Continuous Improvement

The KPI framework is subject to periodic review by the Consortium and the European Commission to ensure continued alignment with:

- the Digital Europe Programme objectives.
- the LLM-BRIDGE Long Jump transition pathway; and
- emerging EU AI ethics and sovereignty priorities.

Any updates[12] on the KPIs to be evaluated will be communicated to the incubator prior to the start of Venture Incubation Programme.

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[12] *Potential modifications requested by the LLM-BRIDGE project Granting Authority to the Consortium.*