



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

Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated on 17 March 2026

1. Summary

This document gathers the questions raised during the webinar about the LLM-BRIDGE incubator call. The questions relate to programme setup, startup selection, Demo Day logistics, budget aspects, and the application process. All references can be found in the official Call document. The document can be download on the LLM-BRIDGE website, at the bottom of the Open Call page.

In case you require any further clarification, do not hesitate to contact the team at llm-bridge@28digital.eu

2. Frequently Asked Questions

2.1. Programme, Structure & Delivery Format

How many 1-1 mentoring sessions are to take place with each of the 30 startups?

The Open Call requires delivery of a 12-week incubation programme including “structured mentoring and coaching” (Section 3.1, p.6) and refers to “weekly mentoring sessions” (Section 4, p.7), but it does not set a minimum or maximum number of 1:1 sessions per startup. The mentoring format and intensity should therefore be proposed by the incubator, while ensuring that mentoring activity is tracked and reported (Annex H.3 reporting template, p. 33).

Is the focus on the whole EU or should there be any specific countries to focus on?

The Open Call is open to incubators legally established in EU Member States or Digital Europe Associate Countries (Annex A.3, p. 18). The programme should support accessibility across Europe and foster cross-border participation (Section 3.3, p. 7).

What is the timeline of the VIP and reporting obligations?

The Open Call schedules the agreement signature between the incubator and LLM-BRIDGE partners in May, and programme kick-off in June 2026 (Section 3.2, p. 6). The mid-term review is scheduled in September 2026, and the ‘Final Review & Demo Day’ milestone in December 2026 (Section 10.1, p. 15). Separately, the deliverable table fixes reporting deadlines at month 6 after agreement signature: M6 (summary report) and M12 (final report) (Annex G, Table 5, p. 30).

Can multiple entities or incubators form a consortium to deliver the VIP?

Only one proposal will be selected, but it can include partners as part of a consortium. The application should then clearly state the division of responsibilities for the VIP and reporting obligations.

Question regarding this technical requirement to “facilitate access to technical resources, including data spaces, LLM models, and HPC infrastructures”: does the incubator have to : a) provide, for free, computation resources to all start-ups to train and execute their LLM models, as well as data for training models, and existing models, or b) Each startup will bring their own data and LLM models and we would provide only technical support, but not data or infrastructure?

The Open Call requires the incubator to facilitate access to technical resources (including data spaces, LLM models, and HPC infrastructures) (Section 3.1, p. 6), but it does not specify whether these resources must be provided free-of-charge by the incubator, nor does it define the cost model or who pays. The incubator must ensure startups can access these resources as part of programme delivery, in coordination with the LLM-BRIDGE consortium and within the proposed implementation approach.

Is the VIP schedule expected to be an intensive, full-day program?

No, the programme is adapted to early-stage teams where founders are usually still not full time in the project. The call defines the duration (12 weeks) and the required components (mentoring, training, business development support, reporting) (Section 3.2, p.6), but leaves programme design choices (including intensity and weekly time commitment) to the incubator. More information on the delivery responsibilities and weekly mentoring sessions can be found in Section 4, p. 7.

Regarding the cohort of 30 startups, is the incubator expected to provide dedicated one-to-one mentoring for every team, or is a ‘many-to-many’ mentoring model acceptable?

The Open Call requires structured mentoring and coaching and refers to weekly mentoring sessions, but it does not prescribe 1:1 versus group formats. A blended model (group sessions and targeted 1:1 support) is compatible with the call provided the incubator can evidence delivery through monitoring and reporting.

What is the format of participation (onsite / online / hybrid)? While the call mentions that activities may be conducted onsite, online, or in a hybrid format, we would like to confirm whether the final decision on the format lies entirely with the selected incubator, as defined in the implementation plan.

The Open Call explicitly allows activities to be conducted onsite, online, or hybrid (Section 3.3, p. 7). The implementation plan proposed by the incubator should specify the format, consistent with accessibility across Europe.

Language of delivery. We understand that the programme must be delivered in English. Could you please confirm whether this requirement applies to all activities (trainings, mentoring sessions, workshops, and Demo Day)? Additionally, are there any specific expectations regarding the level of English proficiency of mentors, provided that materials and sessions are delivered in English?

The proposal must be submitted in English and the incubator must guarantee that the programme will be delivered in English (Section 6.1, p. 9), to ensure consistent evaluation and delivery to an international cohort. The Open Call does not separately define mentors' language proficiency, but if delivery is in English, mentors used in delivery must be able to operate professionally in English.

Mentoring, training, and follow-up structure. Is there a minimum expected number of mentoring sessions, follow-ups, or training hours per startup? Furthermore, does the consortium expect a specific balance between individual and group mentoring sessions, or is this left to the incubator's programme design?

The Open Call does not set a numeric minimum for sessions or hours. It does, however, require "weekly mentoring sessions" and specifies that mentoring and training activity must be tracked through reporting mechanisms. The programme design (including ratios and volumes) is therefore up to the incubator, but must be monitorable and defensible against key performance indicators (KPIs) and reporting templates.

If an incubator is strong in many areas for the VIP and possesses a strong network to bring in outside expertise, but lacks deep in-house technical expertise, does this meet the eligibility criteria? How much technical support will there be from the LLM-BRIDGE consortium?

If the incubator is not the entity that directly delivers the programme, it would be more difficult to comply with the activities that they will commit to, as the contract will not be signed with these third parties involved in the delivery of the programme. This will be assessed as a risk during the evaluation of the candidature of the incubator.

Eligibility requires operational capacity and access to experienced mentors and 'AI technical experts' (Section 4, p. 7), as well as the ability to facilitate access to technical resources (Section 3.1, p. 6). A model relying heavily on external experts can be acceptable if the incubator can demonstrate reliable access and delivery capacity. However, the Open Call does not define a guaranteed 'technical support package' from the consortium beyond expecting coordination and access facilitation.

3. Eligibility

How strict is the requirement for prior GenAI/NLP incubation experience?

The Open Call states that relevant experience is an eligibility requirement. Applicants must have 'demonstrable experience... particularly within Generative AI and NLP' (Section 6.1, p. 9), and Annex A adds at least three years' incubation/acceleration experience, 'preferably' in AI/NLP/deep-tech (Annex A.3, p. 18).

Do the companies need to be incorporated (i.e. legally established, registered as a legal entity)?

The Open Call states that the incubator must be 'legally established in a European Union Member State or Digital Europe Associated Countries' (Section 6.1 Eligibility Criteria, p. 9). Details regarding the eligibility requirements of the startups will be covered in the Open Call for Startups.

Who pays for the companies to travel to the first and last in-person days?

Travel costs should be included in the budget (if the incubator wants them to be covered by the proposed funding), although only the Demo Day will be held in person (Annex D.2, p. 23; budget summary p. 37).

One company from your consortium is already our partner, and we were planning to include it in our network. Could this represent a potential conflict of interest?

The Open Call requires a declaration confirming absence of conflict of interest. It does not enumerate specific relationship scenarios, so you should answer in conditional, process terms: any applicant must declare and manage conflicts. The contracting authority can treat unmanaged conflicts as a compliance issue (Annex H.1, p. 31).

How can the applicants confirm that they have sufficient expertise and experience within the deep tech and generative AI ecosystem? How many AI startups are considered sufficient?

Previous experience of your experts and your organisation will be considered as proof, and there is no specific number of AI startups required. It requires applicants to demonstrate operational capacity, access to mentors and networks, and relevant track record, which will be assessed through evaluation criteria (track record; networks and access) (Annex C, pp. 21-22).

Our legal structure is a foundation (non-profit entity). Are we eligible?

Yes, your legal structure as a foundation (non-profit entity) does not pose any eligibility restrictions. The Open Call does not restrict applicants by legal form (for-profit vs non-profit). Eligibility is framed in terms of being a legal entity established in an EU Member State or associated country and meeting capacity/experience criteria. A foundation is therefore eligible if it meets these conditions (Annex A.3, p.18).

In the Infoday Webinar, a 7% flat rate was mentioned. What does the 7% flat rate mean? Is this within the 60k budget or will we receive it on top separately?

As a helpful tip, a 7% flat rate can be considered by applicants when drafting the budget proposal to cover indirect costs. Note that amounts exceeding €60K will not be funded. Also, subcontracting costs are not subject to this indirect cost rate (see Digital Europe Programme). The Open Call explicitly states: 'No additional or indirect cost reimbursement is provided' (Annex D.2, p.23).

Can the proposal be submitted by a Consortium?

The proposal can be submitted by a consortium. Complementarity of expertise can be an asset, provided it contributes into stronger programme delivery. However, clear and effective coordination among the entities must be ensured. More information can be found in the Open Call's section on Financial Support Agreement signed with the selected incubator in Section 5.2, p. 18; Annex G.1, p. 29).

4. Demo Day

Are there any expectations in terms of programme's format? Is it OK if the kick-off and the demo day are fully online? Or at least one of both must be on-site?

The Open Call says activities may be onsite/online/hybrid (Section 3.3, p. 7) and describes Demo Day as part of programme delivery. It does not explicitly require the Demo Day to be in-person, but it is a strong expectation.

Will the Demo Day take place at incubator's facilities? Should the incubator allocate budget to bring the startups? Or will it be organised by LLM-BRIDGE consortium and the incubator is expected to collaborate on the organization, but not to host it?

The incubator is required to collaborate on the organisation and management of Demo Day (Section 3.1) and deliverables include organising the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day (Section 3.4, p. 7). The incubator is not responsible for covering the travel expenses of the startups (Annex D.2, p. 23).

Is the Demo Day date fixed in December, or can it be scheduled in November if the incubator hosts a major investor event at that time?

The Demo Day is expected to happen at the end of the programme, in September at the earliest (Section 10.1, p. 15).

Who covers the travel expenses and per diem costs for the Demo Day? Who covers the cost for the startups participating in the Demo Day? Will all 30 startups participate by delivering a pitch at the Demo Day?

The cost of travel for the Demo Day can be covered with the requested funding of the incubator (please note that travel and accommodation costs for the startups will be covered by themselves). Only the five finalists from the VIP programme will attend the Demo Day.

Should there be offline events?

Yes, there will be a Demo Day that will be held in person.

5. Startups

Who will be responsible for selecting the 30 startups: the LLM-BRIDGE consortium or the incubator?

The startup selection will be carried out by the consortium, following a process similar to this Open Call. The incubator can be involved in this process. A separate Open Call will be held for the selection of the startups, which will have more details on eligibility requirements.

Can the focus of startups be narrowed further? i.e., startups using LLMs/Gen AI in healthcare?

If they develop LLMs/GenAI, there are no restrictions on the field of application.

Should the startups' travel and accommodation costs be covered by the project?

No, the budget for the incubator should only cover its own costs.

Will the registration form for initial startup onboarding will be provided by you? Or is the submission form for startups incl. a mini site to be provided by the selected provider?

The selection of startups will follow a process similar to the Open Call for Incubators, and it will be the consortium's responsibility to prepare the necessary documents.

Should supported startups merely use Generative AI/LLMs in their products, or are you specifically seeking startups developing the underlying GenAI/LLM technology?

The Open Call states that LLM-BRIDGE 'is an EU-funded initiative designed to accelerate the emergence of **European startups developing solutions powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) and Generative AI (GenAI)**' (Introduction, p. 3, see also Annex C.2 Evaluation criteria, p. 21). The Open Call does not limit the incubator or startups' focus to be on using generative AI or developing generative AI technology. More details on the startup eligibility will be announced when the Open Call for Startups is launched.

Will it be hard to find 30 startups per batch at this stage?

The startup selection will be carried out by the consortium, which will conduct specific activities to reach the target number of startups for the programme. The consortium has access to a vast network of potential applicants.

Who is responsible for defining the selection criteria for the startups participating in the VIP? Is this responsibility fully delegated to the selected incubator, or are the criteria (or final selection) validated or jointly defined with the LLM-BRIDGE consortium?

The selection criteria will be defined by the consortium, the incubator can be involved in the selection process.

Could you please confirm the exact eligibility requirements for startups? Must startups be legally established in an EU Member State or Digital Europe Associated Country, or would it also be acceptable for non-European teams to participate?

They must be legally established in an EU member state or Digital Europe Associated country. A separate Open Call will be held for the selection of the startups, which will have more details on eligibility requirements.