LLM-BRIDGE – Acceleration Programme – Open Call – 1st Cohort

Open Call for GenAI and Language Technology Scale-ups

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1. Introduction

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium invites market-ready companies developing solutions powered by Generative AI (GenAI) and Language Technologies to apply for participation in the Acceleration Programme — a 14-week programme designed to propel high-potential European GenAI scale-ups towards investment readiness and market expansion.

This call is open to companies at TRL (Technology Readiness Level) 8–9 i.e. offering technology proven in operational conditions, with commercially active products, and plans to scale towards Series A funding. The programme combines business optimisation, technical acceleration on European HPC infrastructure, regulatory compliance support, and curated access to investors through the Investor Roundtable Summit, tentatively planned to take place in April 2027.

The Acceleration Programme is at the centre of Work Package 4 (WP4) of the LLM-BRIDGE project, co-funded under the EU Digital Europe Programme (Grant Agreement 101226136). The Programme is led by 28DIGITAL in collaboration with ALT-EDIC, ADRA, and other LLM-BRIDGE Consortium partners.

This is a services-based programme. No Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) is provided to selected companies. Participating companies receive expert advisory services, technical infrastructure access, and strategic support delivered directly by consortium partners — at no cost to the participant.

A target of 15 companies will be selected for Cohort 1. A second cohort will be launched through a separate open call, expected in July 2027.

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

2. Strategic Context and Objectives

The LLM-BRIDGE project aims to establish a pan-European innovation ecosystem supporting the development, deployment, and scaling of Large Language Models (LLMs) and GenAI technologies. Within this framework, The Acceleration Programme targets a mature segment of the European GenAI startup community: companies with proven technology and early commercial traction, ready to scale but lacking structured access to investment-readiness support, advanced infrastructure, and European investor networks.

The programme contributes directly to the following LLM-BRIDGE grant indicators:

Indicator	Description	Target
2.4	Total startups / SMEs participating in the Acceleration Programme (≥ 15 per cohort)	≥ 30
2.5	Startups receiving the Acceleration Prize (service-based)	6

2.6	Ventures attracting external investment post-programme	10
2.7	Investors attending pitch events and Demo Days	> 150
2.8	Total VC funding mobilised for supported startups (pre-seed & seed)	€5M

The Acceleration Programme specifically addresses the gap between technology validation and actual market scaling. The programme strengthens European digital sovereignty by giving preferential recognition to companies using European AI infrastructure, open-source models, and EU language datasets.

3. Scope of the Call

3.1 Activities Covered by the Call

Selected companies will participate in a structured 14-week programme combining workshops, one-on-one mentoring sessions with senior experts from the consortium and its networks, and peer-to-peer networking among the selected cohort of European GenAI scale-ups.

3.2 Duration and Cohort Structure

The Acceleration Programme operates over two sequential cohorts. This call concerns Cohort 1 only. The 14-week delivery runs from January 2027 to April 2027, followed by the Investor Roundtable Summit (tentatively April 2027, Wolves Summit).

Phase	Period
Call preparation & publication	September 2026
Open call (approx. 2 months)	September – November 2026
Eligibility screening	November 2026
Independent evaluation	November – December 2026
Consortium approval & notification	December 2026 – January 2027
Programme delivery (14 weeks)	January 2027 – April 2027
Investor Roundtable Summit (Wolves Summit, tentative)	April 2027

3.3 Geographical and Operational Coverage

The call is open to companies legally established in EU Member State. Programme delivery is delivered fully online, through group webinars, online workshops, and individual mentoring sessions. In-person attendance is required only for the Investor Roundtable Summit (tentatively Wolves Summit, April 2027).

4. Role and Responsibilities of Selected Companies

By accepting a place in the Acceleration Programme, selected companies commit to the following:

- Active participation in all programme phases, workshops, and peer-to-peer sessions.
- Availability of at least one founding team member for scheduled one-on-one mentoring sessions throughout the 14 weeks.

- Achievement of the KPI targets agreed during onboarding, based on the baseline set during the diagnostic phase).
- Timely completion of diagnostic tools, KPI dashboards, financial models, and an investor-grade data room as required by the programme curriculum.
- Full participation in the Investor Roundtable Summit (tentatively Wolves Summit, April 2027), including the public pitching session.
- Cooperation with LLM-BRIDGE consortium partners in reporting, dissemination, and impact measurement activities.
- Compliance with EU visibility requirements (Section 9) and co-branding obligations on all materials referencing Acceleration Programme participation.
- Prompt notification to the Open Call Management Team (OCMT) of any material changes to company status, team composition, or investment situation during the programme.

Non-compliance with participation obligations may result in removal from the programme and ineligibility for the Acceleration Prize.

5. Programme Support Conditions

5.1 Nature of Support

The Acceleration Programme is a services-based programme. No direct financial transfer is made to the selected companies. All support is delivered in-kind by consortium partners at no cost to the participant. This programme does not constitute Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) and is not subject to FSTP rules.

5.2 Services Delivered

The programme combines workshops, one-on-one mentoring, and peer-to-peer networking. Each phase starts with a group webinar explaining objectives, tools, constraints, and featuring a Q&A session. Individual mentoring needs are addressed during online workshops and in dedicated one-on-one sessions. Peer-to-peer networking is structured into the cohort design — companies are regularly encouraged to share experience and best practices, challenging assumptions and developing cross-referral and partnership opportunities. The Investor Roundtable Summit is the sole in-person event.

Phase	Weeks	Focus Areas	Partner(s)
Onboarding & Diagnostic	W1–2	Company diagnostic; baseline KPI setting; personalised roadmap; HPC onboarding	All
Business Optimisation	W3–8	Go-To-Market (GTM) strategy; pricing & commercialisation; sales playbook; partnership development; leadership coaching; ecosystem navigation and partner discovery	AIC4NL
Technical Acceleration	W3–8	HPC compute ; EU language datasets; model fine-tuning & benchmarking; multilingual scaling	ALT-EDIC

Regulatory Compliance	W7–9	Overview of EU digital regulations and their applicability to GenAI/NLP startups; Responsible AI framework; Navigating the EU AI policy landscape	ALT-EDIC
Investment Readiness	W9–12	Fundability gap analysis; investor narrative & pitch deck; financial model; data room blueprint; public funding options review (EBN); pitching workshop	28DIGITAL
Summit Preparation	W13–14	Final pitch rehearsal; investor brief; Wolves Summit matchmaking logistics; Demo Day preparation	28DIGITAL / All

Note: Investor outreach, list building, and fundraising execution are not included in the programme.

5.3 The Acceleration Prize

At th conclusion of the programme, 3 companies from Cohort 1 will be awarded the Acceleration Prize . Prize winners are proposed by 28DIGITAL and ADRA, and approved by the consortium, based on outcome-based assessment at the Investor Roundtable Summit. All programme participants are eligible.

The prize comprises two components:

- Prize A — A2F Fundraising Programme (28DIGITAL Growth Services): 12-month senior fundraising advisory support — investor targeting, outreach, matchmaking, and feedback.
- Prize B — ADRA Membership: Includes access to the ADRF (AI, Data and Robotics Forum) Convergence Summit, and the opportunity to connect with actors across the entire value chain in the AI, data and robotics ecosystem.

The Acceleration Prize does not constitute Financial Support to Third Parties and carries no FSTP obligations for prize recipients.

6. Application, Eligibility & Selection Criteria

6.1 Application Process

This open call will be published on the LLM-BRIDGE website (https://www.llm-bridge.eu/programmes/) and additional partner communication channels and ecosystem networks. Each applicant must register and submit their application through the following link: https://share.hsforms.com/2oEYnzxgZRTyPKpXUvyrf8wf4os platform before the deadline (17:00 CET on the final submission day, i.e. **November 18th 2026**).

Applicants must complete the following:

- Completed application form (link available on the LLM-BRIDGE website and here: https://share.hsforms.com/2oEYnzxgZRTyPKpXUvyrf8wf4os).
- Company overview: legal entity, founding date, team composition, location.
- Product/technology description: TRL evidence, MVP deployment context, market validation data.

- Commercial traction evidence: customer references, revenue data, growth metrics, or equivalent.
- Investment history and Series A readiness roadmap.
- Team CVs demonstrating technical GenAI/Language Technologies expertise and business capability.
- Declaration of eligibility and consent to data processing (included in the application form online).

6.2 Eligibility Criteria

Applications will be subject to an administrative and eligibility check prior to evaluation. To be eligible, applicants must satisfy all of the following criteria. Applications that fail to meet any of the eligibility criteria will be excluded, and the applicants concerned will be notified about this decision within ten working days of the submission deadline.

ID	Criterion	Type
E1	Company is legally established in an EU Member State and is active in the GenAI, NLP, or Language Technology ecosystem	Pass / Fail
E2	Validated MVP deployed in real-market conditions; commercial traction demonstrated; Product-Market Fit (PMF) signals evident; TRL 8–9	Pass / Fail
E3	Prior completed funding round or equivalent financial backing; or bootstrapped with sufficient traction; company is preparing for or actively pursuing a Series A round	Pass / Fail
E4	Complementary founding team combining technical GenAI/NLP expertise and business acumen	Pass / Fail

6.3 Selection Criteria

Eligible applications will be evaluated and scored against the five criteria listed in the table below. The maximum score is 35 points plus a 2-point bonus. A minimum threshold applies per criterion; proposals failing any threshold will not be considered for selection.

ID	Criterion	Description	Max	Min Threshold
C1	Technical & market readiness	Validated MVP in real-market conditions; customer traction and PMF signals demonstrated; TRL 8–9 confirmed	5	3
C2	Business model stability & investment potential	Viable revenue model; investment readiness trajectory demonstrated; prior fundraising an advantage but not mandatory	10	6
C3	Team quality & complementarity	Founding team combining deep GenAI/Language Technologies technical expertise with commercial and business capability	10	6
C4	Strategic alignment with LLM-BRIDGE	Focus on multilingual AI, language technologies, or GenAI applications in EU-relevant sectors; contribution to EU digital sovereignty objectives	5	3
C5	Scaling potential & European ambition	Clear path to European expansion; market opportunity size; ability to leverage programme support for Series A readiness	5	3
BONUS	European Stack / Digital Sovereignty	Use of European AI infrastructure, open-source EU models, or EU language datasets; active contribution to EU digital sovereignty	+2	None

All evaluators sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality before accessing proposals. Results are documented in: Individual Evaluation Forms (IEF); Consensus Reports (CR); Panel Evaluation Summary Report (ESR). All records are stored by 28DIGITAL on behalf of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium for audit and reporting.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome within 4 weeks of the completion of the panel ranking.. Each applicant receives an ESR with individual scores and consensus assessment. Selected companies will be invited to onboarding. Unsuccessful applicants receive formal feedback and may re-apply in the 2nd cohort open call scheduled for Autumn 2027.

6.4 Tiebreakers

In the event of equal total scores, priority will be given to applications demonstrating, sequentially: higher score in C2 (Business Model); higher score in C3 (Team); greater team diversity and gender balance; broader European geographic or multilingual technology coverage.

6.5 Summary of the Evaluation Process

The evaluation process follows eight steps:

- Step 1 — Call published (September 18th, 2026): Open for approximately 2 months; information webinar held at least 3 weeks before the submission deadline.
- Step 2 — Eligibility screening: Administrative check by the LLM-BRIDGE OCMT after the closure of the application process.
- Step 3 — Independent evaluation: Minimum 2 independent external evaluators assess each eligible proposal individually using the selection criteria in section 6.3.
- Step 4 — Score reconciliation, report & tiebreakers: Evaluators produce a consensus score; tiebreakers applied where scores are equal; feedback provided by email.
- Step 5 — Reserve list established: A ranked reserve list will be maintained for contingency. If a selected company withdraws before programme start, the next-ranked eligible application may be offered a place, subject to consortium approval.
- Step 6 — Redress mechanism open: Applicants may submit procedural redress requests (Section 7) from the date of notification.
- Step 7 — Consortium approval & notification: Final ranking approved by the consortium; selected companies notified and invited to onboarding.
- Step 8 — Dispute settlements: Any outstanding disputes handled by the Internal Review Committee prior to programme start.

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. 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.

Grounds for Redress: Requests must clearly identify the specific procedural error or inconsistency. 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 selection decisions are not valid grounds.

Format and Submission: Submit electronically to contact@llm-bridge.eu with subject line "Redress Request — LLM-BRIDGE Acceleration Programme 1st Call [Application ID]", including:

- 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

The OCMT will acknowledge the request within two (2) working days and establish an Internal Review Committee, independent of the original evaluation, to examine the complaint. If a valid procedural error is confirmed, the proposal — or relevant parts of it — may be re-evaluated by a new set of independent experts. The outcome will be communicated within ten (10) working days of receipt of 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 lead partner for WP4, reserves the right to apply corrective actions if necessary. The consortium reserves the right to make justified exceptions where necessary to preserve fairness, transparency, or compliance with EU funding rules.

8. Data Protection, Ethics, and Compliance

8.1 General Principles

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium is committed to comply with:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) on the protection of personal data
- Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (EU AI Act), where applicable to the applicant's technology
- Relevant provisions of the EU Grants Model Grant Agreement applicable to the Digital Europe Programme

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 under GDPR principles of lawfulness, fairness, and transparency. Data will be retained only for the duration required by contractual and audit obligations. Access is strictly limited to authorised LLM-BRIDGE consortium members, the European Commission, and independent evaluators bound by confidentiality agreements. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all personal data contained in their submissions is shared in compliance with GDPR.

8.3 Ethics and Responsible AI Conduct

Selected companies are expected to:

Uphold the highest ethical standards in all programme-related activities

- Ensure that AI-based methodologies comply with principles of transparency, accountability, human oversight, and non-discrimination as defined in EU law
- Cooperate with consortium partners on EU AI Act compliance pathway activities delivered during the Regulatory Compliance pillar
- Implement data governance practices aligned with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and trustworthy AI guidelines.

8.4 Intellectual Property Rights

All information and documentation submitted in the context of this call are considered confidential and may not be disclosed to third parties without prior written consent from the applicant. Ownership of results and methodologies developed by participating companies remains with those companies. The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium may use anonymised or aggregated programme data for reporting and dissemination purposes.

8.5 Data Controller and Contact

28DIGITAL acts as Data Controller for all personal data collected through this open call. Contact: contact@llm-bridge.eu — subject line "Data Controller Inquiry — LLM-BRIDGE Acceleration Programme 1st Call [Application ID]".

9. Communication and Visibility Requirements

9.1 EU Visibility Obligations

Each selected company must:

- Display the European Union emblem and include the following acknowledgement text on all materials, websites, and digital content related to Acceleration Programme participation: "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 relevant public-facing materials, ensuring clear co-branding with the European Union emblem.
- Acknowledge EU support in all press releases, presentations, publications, and events connected to programme participation.
- Use official graphic templates and brand guidelines provided by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

9.2 Dissemination and Outreach

Selected companies are expected to:

- Promote their Acceleration Programme participation and the LLM-BRIDGE programme objectives within their regional and national networks
- Contribute to LLM-BRIDGE success stories, impact publications, and progress reports as requested
- Cooperate with the consortium in preparing shared impact publications for the European Commission

9.3 Compliance and Sanctions

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

- Removal from the programme and ineligibility for the Acceleration Prize
- Reporting of non-compliance to the European Commission as part of the project's periodic monitoring process

10. Expected Timeline

The LLM-BRIDGE Consortium launches the Acceleration Programme 1st Cohort open call in September 2026. All dates below are indicative; applicants will be notified of any updates via the call website and direct communication.

Phase	Indicative Date
Call publication	September 18th, 2026
Information webinar	≥ 3 weeks before deadline
Submission deadline (17:00 CET)	November 18th, 2026
Eligibility screening	November 2026 (day after call closure)
Independent evaluation	November 2026
Consensus meeting & panel ranking	Dec 2026
Notification of results	Dec 2026 – Jan 2027
Programme start (Cohort 1)	January 7th, 2027
Programme end (Cohort 1)	April 2027
Investor Roundtable Summit	April 2027

In the event of any updates to the call, all applicants will be directly informed and a public announcement will be displayed on the call website.

10.1 Contact Information

All official communications will be conducted via email through the address provided in the application form. The OCMT will acknowledge receipt of all applications within five working days of the deadline.

LLM-BRIDGE Acceleration Programme Open Call Helpdesk

contact@llm-bridge.eu — subject line: "Open Call Helpdesk — LLM-BRIDGE Acceleration Programme 1st Call [Application ID]"

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

Annex A. Scoring Guide

Scoring Descriptors

C1 – Technical & Market Readiness (max 5 points, threshold 3)

Score	Descriptor
5	MVP fully deployed in live market conditions; active paying customers; strong, documented PMF evidence; TRL 9
4	MVP in active commercial use; early but clear traction; PMF signals evident; TRL 8–9
3 ✓	MVP demonstrated in real-market conditions; limited traction but credible signals; TRL 8 (THRESHOLD)
2	MVP exists but limited real-market validation; traction minimal or anecdotal
1	Prototype or near-MVP; limited market exposure
0	No market validation

C2 – Business Model Stability & Investment Potential (max 10 points, threshold 6)

Score	Descriptor
9–10	Clear validated revenue model; strong unit economics; actively fundraising or Series A-ready; strong investor interest demonstrated
7–8	Revenue model established; investment readiness in progress; prior round closed or bootstrapped with strong metrics
5–6 ✓	Revenue model defined; investment readiness trajectory evident; Series A preparation underway (THRESHOLD)
3–4	Early revenue model; limited investment readiness; fundraising not yet planned
1–2	Unclear business model; no investment preparation
0	No viable revenue model

C3 – Team Quality & Complementarity (max 10 points, threshold 6)

Score	Descriptor
9–10	Exceptional founding team: deep GenAI/NLP technical lead + strong commercial co-founder; demonstrated track record of building and scaling products
7–8	Strong technical and business pairing; relevant domain experience; minor gaps identifiable
5–6 ✓	Adequate complementarity; both technical and business competence represented; some gaps present (THRESHOLD)
3–4	Predominantly technical or predominantly commercial team; significant complementarity gap
1–2	Limited relevant experience; weak team structure
0	No credible team complementarity

C4 – Strategic Alignment with LLM-BRIDGE (max 5 points, threshold 3)

Score	Descriptor
5	Core LLM/NLP technology; multilingual and EU-sovereign by design; clear contribution to EU digital sovereignty objectives
4	Strong GenAI or language technology focus; clear EU-sector relevance (healthcare, legal, public sector, etc.)
3 ✓	Genuine GenAI application with identifiable alignment to LLM-BRIDGE objectives (THRESHOLD)
2	Adjacent AI technology; limited direct alignment
1	Weak or superficial alignment
0	No alignment with LLM-BRIDGE objectives

C5 – Scaling Potential & European Ambition (max 5 points, threshold 3)

Score	Descriptor
5	Clear, credible European expansion plan; large addressable market; Series A narrative compelling and well-evidenced
4	Defined growth path; good European market opportunity; programme support clearly value-additive
3 ✓	Scaling potential evident; European ambition stated; plan early-stage but credible (THRESHOLD)
2	Scaling plan unclear or insufficiently evidenced
1	Limited growth ambition or purely local scope
0	No scaling strategy

BONUS – European Stack / Digital Sovereignty (max +2 points, no threshold)

Score	Descriptor
+2	Active and demonstrated use of European AI infrastructure (EuroHPC, LUMI), open-source EU models, or EU-curated language datasets; explicit contribution to EU digital sovereignty
+1	Partial use or stated commitment to European stack; alignment with EU digital sovereignty goals
0	No evidence of European stack use or digital sovereignty contribution