

LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort

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

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LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme

1. Introduction

The **LLM-BRIDGE Consortium** invites incubators¹ to apply for the **LLM-BRIDGE² Venture Incubation Programme (VIP)** — an EU-funded initiative supporting European startups that build solutions powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) and Generative AI (GenAI).

The VIP runs across **three cohorts**. The first cohort was run in 2026; **this call concerns the second cohort**, running in 2027; a third call will follow for the 2028 cohort. Each cohort is delivered by one selected incubator over a **12-week cycle**.

This call, launched under the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) scheme of the LLM-BRIDGE project, will select one incubator to design and run the second cohort, supporting at least 30 early-stage startups, with a fixed contribution of maximum EUR 60,000. The call is implemented by 28DIGITAL on behalf of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium.

LLM-BRIDGE aims to contribute to a pan-European innovation ecosystem for the uptake and integration of LLMs across sectors, linking technical excellence — (high-performance computing) HPC resources, data spaces and benchmark infrastructures — with entrepreneurial capacity-building. The project reinforces European technological sovereignty and contributes to the European Digital Decade goals and to the implementation of the AI Act.

The remainder of this document sets out the strategic context and objectives (Section 2), scope of the call (Section 3), funding conditions (Section 4), eligibility, application and selection (Section 5), the procedures governing redress, compliance and communication (Sections 6–8), and timeline (Section 9). Proposals are assessed through a four-stage process: eligibility check, independent evaluation, consensus meeting and panel ranking.

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 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.

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

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

The selected incubator will help startups turn early-stage GenAI ideas into viable, validated and regulatory compliant ventures. The selected incubator will design and deliver the programme while ensuring achievement of the objectives and mandatory programme components described in this Call. Delivery requirements, including training, technical access and KPI reporting, are set out in Sections 3 and 4 and in Annex E.

Beyond the financial contribution, the selected incubator will gain:

- **Pipeline** — direct access to a curated cohort of high-potential GenAI startups from across Europe.
- **Network** — engagement with leading European stakeholders, including ALT-EDIC, 28DIGITAL, ADRA, national AI coalitions and major HPC providers, and long-term connections to investors, policymakers and industry.
- **Resources** — access to the tools, methodologies and technical assets developed under LLM-BRIDGE.
- **Visibility** — a recognised role in a pan-European GenAI initiative, with EU-level exposure through the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day and related events.

3. Scope of the Call

3.1 Programme Structure

The selected incubator will deliver **one 12-week incubation programme** for 30 startups, comprising structured mentoring, training sessions, business development support and access to LLM-specific technical resources.

Each programme follows four phases:

1. **Onboarding** — orientation of startups to the objectives, expectations and methodology of the programme.
2. **Acceleration** — tailored mentoring and business development covering GenAI, model design, ethics, regulation and fundraising.
3. **Demo Day and evaluation** — presentation of outcomes to investors and experts, and assessment against the KPIs in Annex E.

The programme is scheduled to begin in **March 2027**. It may be adjusted to reflect evolving Digital Europe Programme priorities or European Commission guidance.

3.2 Activities and responsibilities of the selected incubator

The selected incubator will design and deliver the Venture Incubation Programme in line with this call document and its annexes. Its responsibilities are:

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Programme delivery

- Support early-stage GenAI ventures in validating their value-proposition, technical solutions and achieving problem-solution-fit.
- Provide structured mentoring and coaching through a network of start-ups experts, AI and digital technologies.
- Facilitate, in collaboration with project partners, access to technical resources, including data spaces, LLM models and HPC infrastructures.
- Guide startups on regulatory and ethical compliance, in particular the AI Act, GDPR and Data Act.
- Organise and manage, in collaboration with project partners, the **LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day**, at which startups present their Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) to investors, mentors and industry stakeholders.

Monitoring and reporting

- Track progress against agreed milestones and collect the qualitative and quantitative indicators defined in **Annex E**.
- Report using the templates in Annex D.3, against the deliverable schedule in Annex C.4.

Ecosystem engagement

- Facilitate connections between startups, research institutions, investors and industrial partners to support post-programme continuity.
- Encourage applications to LLM-BRIDGE follow-up pathways, including the Acceleration and Entrepreneurial Education programmes.

The incubator is expected to designate a **Programme Manager** responsible for operational coordination, reporting and communication with the Consortium.

Through these activities the incubator must contribute to the LLM-BRIDGE strategic outcomes: supporting the growth of the startup cohort; strengthening European GenAI innovation capacity; and promoting ethical, multilingual and culturally adaptive AI systems.

3.3 Geographical Coverage and Diversity

The call is open to incubators established in EU Member States and countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme³.

³ [DIGITAL-2024-BESTUSE-07: Accelerating the best use of technologies](#)

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Activities may be conducted onsite, online, or hybrid, ensuring accessibility for startups across Europe.⁴

The selected incubator 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

Three deliverables are required:

1. an **onboarding plan (D1)**,
2. a **summary report (D2)**
3. a **final report (D3)**

Descriptions and deadlines are set out in **Annex C.4**, reporting templates in **Annex D.3**, and the indicators to be reported in **Annex E**. Verification of deliverables and KPI achievement determines the release of payments (Section 4.3).

4. Funding Conditions

4.1 Legal basis and amount

Financial support to third parties is provided under the LLM-BRIDGE Grant Agreement with the European Commission.² This mechanism enables the Consortium to allocate funding to eligible incubators for implementing the VIP, in full compliance with Digital Europe Programme rules on transparency, fairness and accountability.

The selected incubator will receive a fixed lump-sum contribution of a maximum of **EUR 60,000**, calculated on the basis of predefined activities and measurable outcomes. The contribution may cover costs related to staff, mentoring, management, travel, communication and reporting required to deliver the 12-week programme. **No additional or indirect cost reimbursement is provided.**

4.2 Eligible activities

Funded activities should be aligned with the VIP objectives and include:

- Mentoring and training for startups in accordance with startup validation concepts and lean startup principles;
- Organisation and delivery of incubation modules in the GenAI and LLM domains;
- Access to technical resources and specialist advisory services;
- Monitoring and reporting on startup performance and programme outcomes;
- Organisation of the Demo Day and EU-level dissemination events.

⁴ Please take into consideration that funding does not cover the travel and accommodation of the 30 start-ups.

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

4.3 Payment schedule

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

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

Table 1. VIP payments share and triggers

Stage	Trigger	Payment Share	Description
1.Initial Payment	Contract signature and approved implementation plan (including onboarding and delivery of the onboarding plan)	40 %	Pre-financing to initiate and deliver the incubation cycle.
2.Final Payment	Acceptance of final report; at least 30 incubated startups; at least seven of the eight other performance indicators achieved; mandatory compliance fulfilled	60 %	Released after verification of results by the Consortium.

The final payment is subject to verification of deliverables and KPIs in Annex E. At least 30 startups must be incubated during the approved 12-week cycle, at least seven of the eight other performance indicators in Annex E must meet their respective targets, and all mandatory compliance requirements must be fulfilled. The calculation and consequences of shortfalls are set out in Annex E.4.

4.4 Reporting, verification and audit

Reports are submitted via the official platform and reviewed by the Consortium for completeness and accuracy. Additional verification or clarification may be requested before final approval.

The Consortium and the European Commission reserve the right to conduct document-based or on-site audits, verify that activities correspond to approved plans, and request clarifications or corrective actions before final payment. Audit scope and record-retention obligations are set out in Annex C.5

4.5 Suspension, recovery and sanctions

The Consortium may suspend payments, reduce the final contribution, or recover disbursed funds where:

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- Activities are not implemented as agreed;
- Reports are incomplete, late or falsified;
- Visibility, dissemination, data-protection or ethics requirements are breached; or
- Other contractual obligations are not met.

Amounts to be recovered are calculated pro rata on the basis of validated deliverables and actual progress (See Annex C). Non-compliance may also result in ineligibility for future participation in LLM-BRIDGE open calls and may also be reported to the European Commission as part of the project's periodic audit and monitoring process.

4.6 Funding condition

This collaboration is contingent upon LLM-BRIDGE receiving funding from the European Commission. If the necessary funding is not secured, 28DIGITAL reserves the right to delay, modify or cancel any collaboration agreement, and may adjust agreements in response to changes in circumstances or funding availability.

5. Eligibility, Application and Selection

5.1 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be a legal entity established in an EU Member State or a Digital Europe Associated Country.³
- Have at least three years of experience in startup incubation, preferably in AI, NLP or deep-tech sectors, with demonstrable experience in incubating deep-tech startups.
- Demonstrate the operational and financial capacity to deliver one intensive 12-week incubation programme and manage multiple startups, including access to qualified mentors, facilities, networks and digital infrastructure, and the ability to customise services while meeting programme KPIs.
- Ensure compliance with EU data-protection, ethics and funding regulations.
- Confirm that any co-funding received from other EU or national programmes covers distinct and clearly separable activities, with no double funding, and that participation in LLM-BRIDGE provides complementary added value.
- Submit the specific form via <https://share.hsforms.com/133VDDomZRegeyGTex0VYRwf4os> one complete proposal, and using the official template (Annex D.4).
- Submit the proposal in English and guarantee delivery of the incubation programme in English.
- Not have been selected as an incubator for another LLM-BRIDGE VIP cohort. An incubator may participate as a funded incubator in only one of the three cohorts; an organisation selected for an earlier cohort is ineligible for this call.

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Proposals that do not comply with the eligibility criteria will not be considered for evaluation.

5.2 How to apply

The call is published on the LLM-BRIDGE website (<https://llm-bridge.eu>), the European Commission Funding and Tenders Portal, and additional partner communication channels.

Proposals must be submitted electronically via <https://share.hsforms.com/133VDDomZRegeyGTex0VYRwf4os>, accessible through the LLM-BRIDGE website. **No paper or email submissions will be accepted.**

Applicants must:

1. Register an account on the platform.
2. Complete the online application form and upload the completed proposal (based on the template in **Annex D.4**).
3. Submit the proposal before the deadline: **17:00 CET on 28 November** (see Section 9).

Incomplete or late submissions will not be considered.

5.3 Eligibility check

After the submission deadline, the Consortium checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria, Section 5.1. Applications failing to meet these criteria are declared ineligible and excluded from further evaluation. Applicants are notified of ineligibility by email within 15 **working days** of the closure of the call.

5.4 Evaluation and selection

Eligible proposals are first evaluated by independent external experts appointed by the Consortium, to ensure objectivity and impartiality. Each proposal is assessed by **at least two experts** against the criteria and scoring system in **Annex A**: six weighted criteria — relevance, track record, networks and access, adaptability, monitoring framework and cost effectiveness — with a maximum total of 42 points and a minimum threshold of 26.

The evaluation follows three phases:

1. **Independent review** — each expert assesses proposals individually and submits a signed evaluation report through the secure evaluation platform.
2. **Consensus meeting** — experts discuss scores and comments to produce a unified consensus report and final score per proposal. Remote clarification meetings with applicants may be held where necessary solely to clarify

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information contained in the submitted proposal. No modifications to the proposal will be permitted after the submission deadline.

3. **Panel ranking** — a panel composed of evaluators and Consortium representatives reviews all consensus reports, verifies the application of the evaluation process, and establishes the final ranking list on the consensus scores and applicable thresholds.

Tie-break rules are set out in Annex A.3.

5.5 Communication of results

Following completion of the evaluation, the Consortium formally validates the ranking list established by the evaluation panel and approves the proposal recommended for funding. The selected applicant will be contacted shortly after the evaluation has been completed.

Unsuccessful applicants are notified within five **weeks** of the completion of panel ranking. Each applicant will receive an **Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)** containing individual scores, comments and the final consensus assessment. They may request redress under Section 6, and may re-apply in future call rounds.

All applicants, both selected and non-selected, will be informed of the outcome, exclusively by email, sent to the address provided in the application form. No results will be communicated by phone, in person, or through any other channel. The Consortium will not respond to individual requests for results ahead of this notification. The successful applicant is invited to enter into a Third-Party Agreement with 28DIGITAL, the Consortium partner responsible for this call, and will receive instructions for contract signature and onboarding (Annex C.1) soon after the evaluation has been finalised.

5.6 Reserve list and re-opening

A reserve list of high-ranking proposals is maintained, enabling replacement if the selected incubator cannot complete contracting.

Consortium may re-open the call if no eligible proposal satisfies all applicable individual thresholds and the overall minimum score required for funding, or if no proposal can otherwise be selected in accordance with the published conditions.

6. 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.

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6.1 Process for Submitting a Redress Request

Timing

Requests must be submitted within ten (10) working days from the date of notification of results, i.e. a rejection letter in case of non-eligibility or an 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: contact@llm-bridge.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)

6.2 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 panel and experts, 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.

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6.3 Final Decision

The decision of the Internal Review Committee is final and will be documented in writing and retained for audit purposes.

28DIGITAL acting as the contracting authority for this Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) open call, 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.

7. Data Protection, Ethics, and Compliance

All activities and data-processing operations carried out under this call must comply with the highest ethical standards and the applicable EU, international and national legislation, including, in particular, the GDPR and the AI Act.

28DIGITAL acts as Data Controller for all personal data collected through the open call. Data are processed solely for managing the call, evaluation and contracting; monitoring implementation; and reporting aggregated outcomes to the European Commission. Data are stored securely within the EU and retained for a maximum of five years after the end of the project.

Applicants and evaluators retain their rights of access, rectification, erasure, restriction and objection under the GDPR. All information submitted is treated as confidential, and ownership of the results and methodologies developed by the incubator remains with that organisation.

The selected incubator must uphold the highest ethical standards, ensure that AI-based methodologies are transparent, accountable and subject to human oversight, and guarantee that supported startups meet the same requirements, ensuring 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 contact@llm-bridge.eu with the subject line "*Ethics – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*", as soon as the issue is identified.

Non-compliance may result in the measures set out in Section 4.5.

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Information on how the data submitted by applicants for this call is processed can be found in Annex B (including the data controller contact, the legal basis, processing purposes, data-subject rights and how to exercise them, security measures, ethical standards and intellectual property). **Data Controller contact:** contact@llm-bridge.eu subject line *"Data Controller Inquiry — LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call"*

8. Communication, Dissemination and Visibility

8.1 Visibility obligations

The funded incubator must:

- Display the European Union emblem and acknowledge EU support in all press releases, presentations, publications and events, and websites and digital content related to the funded activities and connected to the participation in the programme:
 - *Acknowledgement: "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, with clear and consistent co-branding alongside the EU emblem. The graphic templates and brand guidelines provided by the Consortium must be used.

8.2 Dissemination and outreach

The funded incubator is expected to:

- Participate in joint dissemination and communication activities organised by the Consortium, and related EU-level or ALT-EDIC events;
- Promote the objectives and results of the VIP within its regional, national and European ecosystems;
- Submit concise activity updates, outreach metrics and examples of media coverage as part of its progress and final reports;
- Contribute to visibility actions coordinated by the Consortium and the European Commission;
- Cooperate with the Consortium in preparing shared success stories and impact publications for the European Commission.

8.3 Publication rights and compliance

The Consortium and the European Commission may publish non-confidential information about the funded incubator — such as name, country, funding amount and project summary — for transparency and reporting purposes. The incubator must ensure that any publication or media content relating to LLM-BRIDGE respects confidentiality, data-protection obligations and intellectual property rights (Section 7).

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The Consortium will verify visibility and dissemination compliance during periodic reviews and at final reporting. Non-compliance may result in the measures set out in Section 4.5.

9. Timeline

The LLM-BRIDGE consortium launches the second VIP open call on 28th of September 2026 with submission deadline on **28th of November 2026 at 17h00 CET**.

9.1 Indicative Timeline

Table 2. VIP Milestones and Timeline

Milestone	Indicative Date	Description
Call Opening for Submissions	28 September 2026	Online submission system becomes active; templates and guidance available on the project website.
Submission Deadline	28 November 2026	Call closes. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered.
Evaluation Period	until end of December 2026	Eligibility check, independent review, consensus, and panel ranking.
Notification of Results	February 2027	Applicants notified by email with Evaluation Summary Report.
Contract Signature	March 2027	Third-Party Agreement signed between selected incubator and 28DIGITAL.
Programme Kick-off	April 2027	On-boarding and start of implementation activities
Mid-term Review	May 2027	Monitoring of progress and verification of milestone delivery.
Programme Completion & Demo Day	June - July 2027	Completion of activities and LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day event.
Final Review	December 2027	Completion of activities, final reporting, and participation in the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day event.

In the event of any updates to this Call, all registered applicants will be informed directly by email. Additionally, a prominent notice describing the update will be displayed on the Call website to ensure visibility for all current and potential applicants.

9.2 Contact Information

For questions regarding the submission process, eligibility, or evaluation procedure, please contact:

LLM-BRIDGE Open Call Helpdesk
contact@llm-bridge.eu with the subject line “Open Call Helpdesk – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]”.

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Queries submitted after the application deadline (28 November) will not be considered.

Annex A - Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Grid

A.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. In all cases the maximum score corresponds to "Excellent", and the threshold is aligned with the "Good" level.

Overall minimum score: 26 out of 42. Proposals failing to reach the threshold on any individual criterion will not be considered for funding.

A.2 Evaluation Criteria

Table 3. Evaluation criteria

Criterion	Description	Maximum Threshold Score	
Relevance	Alignment of the proposal with the LLM-BRIDGE objectives, including the ability to support early-stage GenAI startups, using startup validation methodology and lean startup principles and fostering 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, research organisations, corporate partners, 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
		42	26

Table 4. Criterion Scoring Scale

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.

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Fair	3-4	3-4	2	Some strengths but significant weaknesses remain.
Good (<i>minimum threshold</i>)	5-6	5	3-4	Criterion adequately addressed with moderate weaknesses.
Very good	7-8	6-7	4-5	Criterion well addressed, only minor weaknesses.
Excellent	9-10	8	5-6	Criterion fully addressed; outstanding quality with no or negligible weaknesses.

A.3 Consensus and Ranking

After individual evaluations, experts reach a consensus score for each proposal. A Panel Meeting consolidates all consensus reports and establishes 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 Relevance.

Higher score in Track Record.

Higher score in Networks and Access.

If proposals remain tied after applying the 3 tie-break criteria, the Evaluation Panel will take into account the diversity of the team and the geographical reach of the incubator's activities across Europe when determining the final ranking.

A.4 Evaluation Documentation

All evaluators sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality 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.

Annex B - Data Protection, Ethics and Compliance

B.1 Data Protection Responsibilities

28DIGITAL acts as the Data Controller for all data collected in this FSTP Open call, including 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)⁵

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

B.2 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:

llm-bridge@28digital.eu with the subject line "*Privacy - LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]*". 28DIGITAL 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).

B.3 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.

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679>

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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.

Annex C - Contracting and Monitoring Procedures

C.1 Contracting Framework

The selected incubator will formalise its participation in the *LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme (VIP)* by signing a Third-Party Agreement (TPA) with 28DIGITAL. The TPA 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, the selected incubator 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.

C.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
- Introduce communication templates, KPI tracking tools, and the LLM-BRIDGE reporting portal⁶.

Attendance at the onboarding session is mandatory for the Incubator's designated Programme Manager.

C.3 Implementation and Monitoring

The Incubator will implement its assigned 12-week incubation programme according to the work plan approved in the Third-Party 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.

⁶ Accessible through LLM-BRIDGE's website, <https://llm-bridge.eu>

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3. Final Review – Conducted after 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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C.4 Deliverables and Milestones

The 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.	Week 10 of the programme
D3 – Final Report	Comprehensive report of outcomes, KPIs achieved, and supporting evidence.	Within 30 days after programme finalization

Verification of deliverables determines release of payments according to Section 4.3.

C.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.

C.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 LLM-BRIDGE Consortium before implementation.

The LLM-BRIDGE 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.

C.7 Communication of Results and Closure

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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://llm-bridge.eu>)
- Issue a formal closure letter and a completion certificate to the incubator.

Final approval constitutes completion of the programme-delivery and reporting obligations, without prejudice to obligations that survive closure, including record retention, confidentiality, audit/check rights and recovery obligations.

Annex D - Templates and Declaration Forms

D.1 Declaration of Honour

Project: LLM-BRIDGE | Grant Agreement No. 101226136

FSTP call ID: LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort

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:
 - is a legally established entity in an EU Member State or Digital Europe Associated Country.
 - has not been declared bankrupt, is not under insolvency or liquidation proceedings, and is financially stable.
 - has not been selected as the funded incubator for another LLM-BRIDGE VIP cohort.
 - is not in a conflict of interest with the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium or its partners.
 - is not receiving duplicate funding for the same activities from any other EU or national programme.
 - complies with the ethical, environmental, and social principles of the European Union.
3. The organisation commits to:
 - implement the Venture Incubation Programme (VIP) activities in accordance with the approved work plan and the Third-Party Agreement.
 - comply with all data-protection, ethical-AI, and reporting requirements stated in the Call document.
 - display the EU and LLM-BRIDGE logos and acknowledgement text on all communication materials as set out in Section 8.

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)

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D.2 GDPR Consent Form

Project: LLM-BRIDGE | Grant Agreement No. 101226136

FSTP call ID: LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort

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 Privacy Notice for this Open Call.
2. They consent to the processing of their personal and organisational data by 28DIGITAL solely for the purposes of:
 - managing the application, evaluation, and selection process of this open call.
 - preparing the Third-Party Agreement and processing related payments; and
 - 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: _____

Programme - Open Call**D.3 Reporting Template**

Project: LLM-BRIDGE | Grant Agreement No. 101226136

FSTP call ID: LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort

Reporting Period: ☐ Summary Report ☐ Final Report

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 that best efforts have been made to ensure 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			

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Activity / Cost Item	Budget (EUR) Used (EUR) Remarks / Deliverables linked
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 Third-Party Agreement.

Signature of Programme Manager: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Legal Representative: _____ Date: _____

Programme - Open Call**D.4 Proposal Template**

Project: LLM-BRIDGE | Grant Agreement No. 101226136

FSTP call ID: LLM-BRIDGE – Venture Incubation Programme - Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort

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
- ☐ The applicant organisation has not been selected as the funded incubator for another LLM-BRIDGE VIP cohort

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.

Describe the concrete activities, expertise, and approach your organisation brings to support early-stage GenAI startups

Answer:

Programme - Open Call**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.

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.

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. Provide concrete examples demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to change.

Answer:

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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. 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.

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	

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

Annex E Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Incubators

E.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. The programme target is approximately 30 startups per cohort and at least 90 startups across the three cohorts. For this second cohort, the minimum is 30 incubated startups. Achievement of the thresholds below is linked to milestone verification and final payment.

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 across three VIP cohorts/call rounds. Achievement of the agreed KPI thresholds is directly linked to milestone verification and final payment.

E.2 KPIs (quantitative)

Table 6. Incubators KPIs

Performance Area	Indicator / Definition	Measurement Unit	Target per Cohort	Data Source / Evidence
1. Programme Implementation	Number of distinct startups enrolled and actively participating in at least one substantive incubation activity within the approved 12-week cycle	Count of incubated startups	Minimum 30	Enrolment list and dated activity/attendance records
	Share of incubated startups presenting at Demo Day	% of incubated startups (numerator: Demo Day presenters; denominator: all incubated startups)	≥ 80 %	Incubator participant list and Demo Day registry / pitch decks
2. Capacity Building & Mentoring Quality	Average satisfaction score of startups on mentoring and training (1–5 scale)	Mean score	≥ 4.0	Post-programme survey

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3. Innovation & Technical Progress	Share of startups achieving functional MVP validated by mentors or users	% startups	of	≥ 80 %	MVP validation report / prototype demo
4. Market Readiness & Investment Potential	- Startups completing investment-readiness assessment or pitch training - Startups securing investor interest / letters of intent within 6 months post-programme	Count		≥ 10	Training attendance list
5. Ecosystem Engagement & Outreach	- Partnership events organised locally (webinars, roundtables, etc.) - Mentors and partners from industry or academia actively involved	Count		≥ 2 per cohort	Event agenda / photos
6. Communication & Visibility	- Visibility actions showcasing EU and LLM-BRIDGE branding (press release, social media, etc.) - Compliance with branding rules (EU emblem and acknowledgement text)	Count		≥ 3 per cohort	Screenshots / links
7. Reporting & Compliance	- Timely submission of summary and final reports (Annex D.3 template) - Audit-ready documentation available and complete	% on time		100 %	Report review by Consortium
		Qualitative assessment		Compliance	Submission records
					Document checklist by Consortium

E.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.

E.4 KPI Verification and Payment Link

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The Consortium verifies KPI achievement during the Final Review using the evidence listed in Table 6. A startup counts as incubated when it is enrolled in the approved cohort, participates in at least one substantive incubation activity during the 12-week cycle, and appears in the participant and activity records. A startup is counted once. The number counted is the denominator for percentage indicators referring to incubated startups; the Demo Day rate uses this same denominator.

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

Stage 1 – Initial 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 following acceptance of the final report and validation that:

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

at least 30 startups meet the definition of incubated above; and at least seven of the eight other performance indicators in Table 6 meet or exceed their individual targets (Demo Day participation, satisfaction, MVP validation, investment readiness, investor interest, partnership events, mentor involvement, and visibility actions); and

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

A shortfall against the 30-startup minimum prevents release of the final payment until remedied and verified. For other unmet targets, the Consortium assesses the documented shortfall and may reduce the final payment proportionately under the Third-Party Agreement. The incubator will have an opportunity to provide missing evidence or complete corrective actions before the final decision.

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

E.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.

The KPI definitions and payment thresholds applicable to this call will be incorporated into the Third-Party Agreement. Any changes require written agreement before implementation; they cannot retrospectively alter the published eligibility or payment conditions.

Any updates⁷ on the KPIs to be evaluated will be communicated to the incubator prior to the start of Venture Incubation Programme.

⁷ Potential modifications requested by the LLM-BRIDGE project Granting Authority to the Consortium.