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

Frequently Asked Questions
Info Session, 3 November 2026

Co-funded by the European Union (GA 101226136). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Co-funded by the European Union

LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme – FAQs

1. Introduction

This document collects the questions raised by participants during the Q&A of the **info session held on 3 November 2026** on the **LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme – Open Call for Incubators – 2nd Cohort**. Each answer combines the clarifications given by the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium during the session with the relevant provisions of the call document, which are referenced in brackets. In case of any discrepancy, the call document prevails.

Further questions regarding the submission process, eligibility or evaluation procedure can be addressed to the **LLM-BRIDGE Open Call Helpdesk** at contact@llm-bridge.eu with the subject line "Open Call Helpdesk – LLM-BRIDGE Incubator Call [Application ID]". Queries submitted after the application deadline (**28 November 2026 at 17:00 CET**) will not be considered (Section 9.2).

2. The programme and the Demo Day

2.1 Is the incubator responsible for hosting the Demo Day? Will it be physical or online?

Yes. The incubator organises and manages the LLM-BRIDGE Demo Day in collaboration with the project partners; the Consortium can help with outreach. At the Demo Day, startups present their MVPs to investors, mentors and industry stakeholders, and outcomes are assessed against the KPIs (Sections 3.1 and 3.2).

The incubator proposes the format and explains why it works: activities may be onsite, online or hybrid, as long as they remain accessible to startups across Europe (Section 3.3). Demo Day costs are eligible (Section 4.2), and at least 80% of incubated startups must present at it (Annex E, Table 6).

2.2 What has been your experience with onsite events? Since startups' travel cannot be in the budget, are they willing to pay for it, and is it worth it?

In the first cohort, attendance at onsite events was good: the bootcamp, two in-person days organised by the incubator in Milan, and an investor event in Amsterdam organised by the Consortium. Startups were willing to pay and travel, especially when the value was clear, such as meeting investors. Location matters: Milan and Brussels (for the Demo Day) are convenient, while more remote locations could be harder. The first cohort is still being analysed.

If you plan onsite activities, keep in mind that the call requires accessibility for startups across Europe (Section 3.3) and an 80% Demo Day participation rate (Annex E).

2.3 Are startups' flights included in the budget?

No. Funding does not cover the travel and accommodation of the 30 startups (Section 3.3, footnote 4). The lump sum may cover the incubator's own costs related to staff, mentoring, management, travel, communication and reporting (Section 4.1). No additional or indirect cost reimbursement is provided.

2.4 How are the workshops divided between technical and business topics during the 12 weeks?

The incubator proposes the mix and timing. The call sets what must be covered: validation of the value proposition and technical solution towards problem-solution fit; mentoring on GenAI, model design, ethics, regulation and fundraising; access to data spaces, LLM models and HPC infrastructures (in collaboration with project partners); and guidance on the AI Act, GDPR and Data Act (Sections 3.1 and 3.2).

Training should follow startup validation concepts and lean startup principles (Section 4.2). The programme runs through onboarding, acceleration, and Demo Day and evaluation phases (Section 3.1).

2.5 Twelve weeks is short for problem-solution validation, let alone product-market fit. Could the first cohort startups validate properly?

Yes. Startups do not join with just an idea: they already have some problem-solution fit and are at pre-market stage. Some progressed quite successfully over the 12 weeks.

The call targets problem-solution fit, not product-market fit (Section 3.2), and at least 80% of incubated startups must achieve a functional MVP validated by mentors or users (Annex E, Table 6).

2.6 Will the Consortium provide free access to HPC, LLM models and data spaces?

The incubator facilitates access to data spaces, LLM models and HPC infrastructures in collaboration with the project partners (Section 3.2), and gains access to the tools, methodologies and technical assets developed under LLM-BRIDGE (Section 2). The Consortium's 10 partners include HPC providers, and ALT-EDIC (Alliance for Language Technologies) will take over the language data space next year.

More information on the partners and their resources is available at https://llm-bridge.eu.

3. Startups and their selection

3.1 Is the incubator expected to promote the startup call and take part in the selection?

No. The Consortium runs the startup call and selects the startups; the incubator focuses on delivering the incubation programme. The incubator is, however, expected to promote the objectives and results of the VIP within its ecosystems and to take part in the Consortium's dissemination activities (Section 8.2).

3.2 Have the startups already been selected?

No. The startup call that closed in June was for the first cohort, which ran in 2026. The startup call for the second cohort (2027) will be launched very soon (Section 1).

The first cohort startups, with their topics and verticals, are listed at https://llm-bridge.eu.

3.3 Are Kosovo-based startups eligible for the second cohort?

Startup eligibility is defined in the separate startup call, not in this one. For incubators, the call is open to entities established in EU Member States and countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme (Sections 3.3 and 5.1). Please check the current Digital Europe list of associated countries for a specific country.

4. Eligibility and evaluation

4.1 Does the three years of incubation experience have to belong to the applying organisation, or can it come from other parties?

It must belong to the applying organisation: 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 (Section 5.1).

A separate incubator entity running for three years is not required. Organisations with a wider scope of activities qualify if they can demonstrate three years of relevant incubation programmes. Incubators may include VCs, accelerators, innovation consultancies, and business and tech parks, among other entities (Section 1, footnote 1). Organisations selected as incubator for an earlier cohort are not eligible (Section 5.1).

4.2 Is there a conflict of interest if the applicant is a member of 28DIGITAL?

No. 28DIGITAL implements the call on behalf of the LLM-BRIDGE Consortium and signs the Third-Party Agreement with the selected incubator, but does not score the proposals (Sections 1 and 5.5).

Each proposal is assessed by at least two independent external experts, who sign a Declaration of Impartiality and Confidentiality; a panel of evaluators and Consortium representatives then establishes the ranking based on the consensus scores (Section 5.4 and Annex A.4). Applicants must declare that they are not in a conflict of interest with the Consortium or its partners (Annex D.1).

4.3 What distinguished the selected proposal in the first round, and which lessons should the second cohort proposals reflect?

The external evaluators considered it the most comprehensive proposal and the one offering the best value for money. Proposals are scored against six criteria, with a maximum of 42 points and an overall threshold of 26; the threshold of each individual criterion must also be reached (Annex A).

Table 1. Evaluation criteria (Annex A)

Criterion	Maximum Score	Threshold
Relevance	10	6
Track record	8	5
Networks and access	8	5
Adaptability	6	4

Criterion	Maximum Score	Threshold
Monitoring framework	5	3
Cost effectiveness	5	3
Total	**42**	**26**

In case of tied scores, the higher score in Relevance, then Track record, then Networks and access applies; if still tied, the panel considers team diversity and geographical reach (Annex A.3).

5. Payments and KPIs

5.1 What happens to the final 60% payment if not all KPIs are reached?

Payments are released in two stages: 40% upon contract signature and delivery of the onboarding plan, and 60% upon acceptance of the final report (Section 4.3). The final payment requires at least 30 incubated startups, at least seven of the eight other KPIs achieved, and all mandatory compliance requirements (GDPR, branding, reporting) fulfilled (Section 4.3 and Annex E.4).

A shortfall against the 30-startup minimum prevents the release of the final payment until remedied. For other unmet targets, the Consortium may reduce the final payment proportionately to the documented shortfall, and the incubator has the opportunity to provide missing evidence or complete corrective actions first (Annex E.4). The eight other KPIs are (Annex E, Table 6):

Table 2. KPIs for the final payment (Annex E)

Indicator	Target per Cohort
Share of incubated startups presenting at Demo Day	≥ 80%
Average satisfaction score of startups on mentoring and training (1–5 scale)	≥ 4.0
Share of startups achieving a functional MVP validated by mentors or users	≥ 80%
Startups completing investment-readiness assessment or pitch training	≥ 10
Startups securing investor interest / letters of intent within 6 months post-programme	≥ 25%
Partnership events organised locally (webinars, roundtables, etc.)	≥ 2
Mentors and partners from industry or academia actively involved	≥ 10
Visibility actions showcasing EU and LLM-BRIDGE branding	≥ 3

5.2 Since the incubator does not select the startups, did the first cohort show dropouts or missed KPIs (e.g. MVP validation, investor interest) due to cohort maturity rather than programme quality? Has this changed how KPIs and the final payment are assessed for the second cohort?

No. Only one startup dropped out of the first cohort, so the KPIs were not affected.

For the second cohort, a startup counts as incubated when it is enrolled and participates in at least one substantive incubation activity during the 12-week cycle; this number is the denominator for percentage KPIs (Annex E.4). Any KPI updates will be communicated before the programme starts

and incorporated into the Third-Party Agreement; they cannot retrospectively alter the published payment conditions (Annex E.5).