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Design Option Paper:
Matchmaking Corporations - Startups

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1. Introduction

This Design Option Paper (DOP) has been prepared in the context of the Smart Accelerator + I in the Central Bohemia Region. The overall purpose of Smart Accelerator + I is to enable the development of capacities and competences in Central Bohemia contributing to the creation of conditions for strengthening smart specialisation, the development of the regional innovation ecosystem, and the development of cooperation between actors across the spheres of the so-called triple/quadruple helix (especially research organizations, educational institutions, the corporate sphere, and public sector).

As part of Smart Accelerator + I, twinning activities are contemplated to bring unique, relevant, and adaptable instruments to the region. During the process of selecting best practices an internal survey was conducted first among the SIC teams to understand their interests to narrow down the search, these were the main resulting topics: acceleration of technology transfer, acceleration of startups, governance of the innovation ecosystem, working with the business community, and engagement of business angels within the regional innovation ecosystem.

Thus, this best practice called “Matchmaking corporations – startups” responds to the interest of the Business Support team in looking for ways to bring large corporations and startups to collaborate and in turn accelerate the startups’ growth. In addition, this best practice is aligned to the RIS3 Objective A: Established and internationally successful companies built on unique in-house know-how. Within this objective corporations and large firms are considered crucial components of any viable innovation ecosystem, and their effective interlinking with startups.

The organisation implementing this best practice is called Accelerace. It was established in 2008, and is one of the leading accelerators in the Nordics (partly funded by the Danish Government and leading Danish and international corporates) to attract startup talents and create growth. They focus on market development and developed the program “Matchmaking with corporates”, which they have been implementing for more than a decade.

1.1. Structure of the paper

This DOP has the purpose of serving as a guide for SIC for the development of potential complementary services for stakeholders and entrepreneurs in their efforts to solve challenges and foster innovation.

Section 2 describes the challenges for an effective collaboration between large corporations with startups and the way to overcome them by improving their mutual understanding through an intermediary (in this case SIC) to remove some of the risks of the collaboration.

Section 3 is dedicated to the description of the Accelerace’s best practice as a funnel model, as well as its strengths and limitations.

Section 4 focuses on the implementation opportunities for SIC. This section describes how this program or some of its elements can be part of a pilot project, the communication strategy, the impact on the ecosystem, and a way of funding it. Section 5 outlines the main conclusions.

2. Background

2.1 Effective collaboration between large corporations with startups

Innovation today is increasingly led by startups, they are agile and revolutionary both by nature and necessity. They are also better at harnessing technology to recalibrate existing business models and invent new ones altogether. On the other hand, corporations are aware that disruption in their sectors is certain and imminent too, leaving them with a dilemma of whether to try to innovate from within (perhaps by establishing in-house incubators and poaching the best talent), or opt to collaborate or partner with startups instead. From this perspective, one can argue that it's far more valuable for corporations to figure out how to leverage the innovation that startups have accomplished through mutually beneficial partnerships. Working with startups allows corporations to develop and test new technologies and service solutions with less costs and risk to their core operations.

For Blomquist (et. al, 2020) collaboration for corporations means adding value through innovations and new knowledge flows as well as learning from startup culture. For startups, collaboration brings in early customers required for pilot tests, access to production facilities, networks, and human resources. This can help startups deal with the liabilities of newness (the lack of reputation, networks and legitimacy) and smallness (the lack of financial, technological, physical and intangible resources).

This can look like a “perfect match”, nevertheless more often than not this collaboration is very hard to achieve. Thus, it is necessary to understand how innovation happens for corporations and what type of collaboration makes the most sense for startups according to the phase they are in. According to the World Economic Forum (2018), there are five models to innovate for big corporations, these are:

1. A **flat model** in which each of the corporation's business units directly engages with the startup.
 - Often called direct sourcing. The corporation uses or resells the startup's product and benefits from the innovation.
2. A **dedicated innovation unit** that operates within the corporation.
 - Single contact point to guide the interactions of co-innovating startups with all other divisions of the corporation.
 - The innovation unit may use various channels to attract suitable startups to work with (e.g. interactions with incubators and accelerators, technology industry events and fairs, etc.).
3. A **separate corporation incubator** tasked with attracting promising startups whose innovations may later be integrated into the operations of the mother corporation.
 - The incubator attracts startups working on technologies broadly aligned with the corporation's strategy.
 - If and when a startup develops an innovation sufficiently mature for integration into the corporation's existing or future business activities, the corporation becomes its customer or an investor.
4. An **external subsidiary** to which the mother corporation delegates the task of quick innovative prototyping, based on business ideas vetted as promising at the mother company.

- The corporation establishes and funds as a separate entity, a subsidiary dedicated to developing innovative technologies for rapid prototyping – minimal viable prototype (MVP) (with no constraints deriving from the corporation’s existing infrastructure).
 - The subsidiary may identify an external startup as the best partner to implement the MVP or a startup with novel business models that would benefit from access to the corporation’s resources.
 - If the MVP proves to be viable, it is integrated into the corporation’s existing or future business processes.
5. An entire process designed to **spin off a new entity**, of which the mother company will become an investor, for each business idea that is aligned with the general strategy of the mother corporation but could not be effectively pursued in the mother corporation environment.
- Entrepreneurial Co-creation Model. The corporation sets up a co-creation board, composed of internal innovation champions, board-level representatives from the corporation, and external entrepreneurs. Requires substantial digital innovation.
 - Using its innovation and R&D budget the corporation quickly (6 to 12 weeks) evaluates the viability of the business model, strategic relevance, and capital requirements of each such innovation.
 - The corporation creates, together with experienced entrepreneurs, typically from those previously involved in the co-creation board, a new external legal entity, entrusted with the task of bringing the innovation to market. The corporation funds the new entity by becoming an investor, either by itself or together with other investors.
 - This model is normally applicable only for corporations that have sufficiently large annual earnings (an estimate of 50 million euros) or other means of capital to allow multiple simultaneous bets on co-created digital businesses.

Nevertheless, it is not only corporations that need to find a collaboration model. **Startups also need to decide which kind of collaboration makes the most sense to support the launch of the product and the sales and growth of the company.** These are the types of models in the different phases of the startups.

Initial phase

Accelerator and incubator programs are good collaboration models for entrepreneurs when they are about to start their companies.

1. Direct Sales – Proof of Concept.
 - The target is to get first references as a young company to generate trust.
 - This type of collaboration has the benefits of revenues, clients, trust, industry expertise, and understanding of corporate processes and ways of working.
2. Accelerator program
 - The goal is to become venture-ready and have an MVP available.
3. Incubator program
 - The objective is to develop an idea into a venture financing-ready MVP and establish a business plan.

Startup phase

In the early phase of a startup, corporations often want to try out the technology or solution and offer only short-term contracts. This has advantages and disadvantages: often the innovation departments run a lot of trials, but it may be several years before a long-term contract is secured.

4. Partnership co-innovation
 - Work with R&D and innovation departments and create a product out of a raw technology or prototype.
5. Corporate ventures
 - Receive funding and gain access to corporate decision-makers and industry networks.
6. Technology Partner Model
 - The startup uses technology platforms as a basis for their products and innovations.
7. Sales Partner Model
 - The startup works with corporates using their sales channels.

Scale-up phase

Sales, innovation, technology and even corporate venture partners are key to scaling a company globally.

8. B2B Direct Sales
 - Direct sales are the key method and collaboration model for each startup to generate revenues and should be the focus when approaching corporations.
 - Define market segment and list of target corporates, opportunity and purchase process, negotiation, and deal closing.
9. Partnership with Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM)
 - Use the corporation to sell your product as part of their solution.
 - It is not a direct sale but built-in, and success is not guaranteed.

With this in mind, let us break down now the benefits for each side when collaborating, its risks, and challenges. The World Economic Forum published a White Paper in 2018 covering these issues. The main results were quite compelling, and they are still relevant according to Ignite Sweden's research (2023).

Why does collaboration make sense for each party (BENEFITS)?

For corporations	For startups
External innovation and disruption To protect their strategic position, corporations need to become aware of market shifts caused by new technology or innovation in their core or adjacent business fields. External innovators have more freedom to develop truly disruptive solutions. Corporations may discover value not only in increasing revenues and margins in their core businesses but also in the expansion to	Revenues and independence from external capital Revenue is often a key incentive for an early-stage company. As big corporations can invest considerable amounts of money in products, corporations can free startups from the need to seek outside investments. Corporations can also have a long-term interest, which may stabilise a startup and help it to reach

<p>emerging business fields. Innovation secures a future competitive advantage. Internal innovation is often hampered by protecting the core cash cows, collaboration with or acquisition of a startup may also facilitate the necessary disruption of one's business model, which is difficult to achieve from within.</p>	<p>break-even or even profits very early. Such an approach allows the startup to achieve sustainable growth, independently from scarce venture capital.</p>
<p>More innovative suppliers If corporations work only with established tech providers, they risk missing out on potential new sources of revenue: buying from an innovative startup may give a corporation a competitive edge. Startups may also simply outperform existing solution providers to corporate clients because they have fewer overhead costs and a stronger innovation focus.</p>	<p>Success story for future sales Large corporations customers substantially enhance the reputation of startups and serve as reference cases for future sales. As corporate decision-makers look for references before engaging in collaboration, this also triggers a network effect.</p>
<p>Customer focus Startups tend to innovate closer to customer needs as they are not as standard process-driven as established corporations. They can adapt and customise solutions more easily, allowing the corporation to serve its customers better.</p>	<p>Scalable customer base Large corporations can be an ideal target customer as they have enough people, budget, and opportunity to scale. This is helpful for startups and providers of emerging technologies that are looking for their first customers.</p>
<p>Entrepreneurial and more agile culture Working with startups can bring back more openness to innovation and intrapreneurship. In a fast-changing business environment, it is important to actively foster a culture of openness that allows for innovation as much as for failures on the way to new solutions.</p>	<p>Riskless internationalisation Working with corporation headquarters offers the possibility to expand into other countries by partnering with the corporation's local subsidiaries. Moreover, large user bases may also help startups to refine and optimise their products.</p>
<p>Staying on-top of market developments Working with innovators allows a corporation to better track changes in the market that may bring disruption.</p>	<p>Attractive retail sales channel The infrastructure of an established corporation, including its existing clients, allows faster scaling of the startup business model than the startup could achieve on its own.</p>
<p>New revenue streams and business lines Many businesses are pursuing external innovation through open platforms e.g. an app store that offers standardised technological processes for startups to add services to a traditional business model. Such business lines allow a corporation to offer new and creative services to their clients.</p>	<p>Access to proprietary assets Partnering with a corporation can enable a startup to exploit underutilized corporate assets such as data that would otherwise not be accessible, and create new business opportunities.</p>
	<p>Market knowledge and mentoring An established business player can help startups enter the market with its resources. Startups can also tap into the knowledge and long-term experience of the corporation in the form of mentoring.</p>

What are the pitfalls to be aware of (RISKS)?

For corporations	For startups
<p>Reputational damage When a client or corporation data is involved in the product development process, failures may damage the brand and reputation.</p>	<p>Need for revenue Both bootstrapped (without external resources) and venture capital-financed startups have only limited time to find customers or funding to continue their operations. This time factor weighs on any type of collaboration.</p>
<p>Lost investment Many startups fail, so the investment risk for corporations is high compared to their usual investment projects.</p>	<p>Getting engulfed by one customer Focusing on a custom solution for a single large corporation may distract a startup from developing a universal, scalable product and strategy, and limit growth prospects.</p>
<p>Misaligned employees Corporate employees are trained to follow processes and tend to regard failure as jeopardizing their careers. They might feel threatened by the startup's unfamiliar culture and remain overly protective of the status quo.</p>	<p>Delayed projects As several corporations' departments tend to formulate different requirements for the relationship between a startup and a business, this often leads to delays, which are financially hard to handle for a startup.</p>
<p>Unsure outcome When projects include unfinished products or work with startup entrepreneurs and inexperienced teams, results are difficult to predict.</p>	<p>Waste of resources Corporations may not pursue a strong collaboration, and rather consider startups as a source of free consultancy. This tends to take up a lot of the startup's resources.</p>
<p>Maturity misalignment When corporations engage with startups that are proposing a new business model or a new technology that the corporation is not yet ready to adopt or to experiment with, this inherently leads to a fruitless collaboration.</p>	<p>Premature scaling The startup may scale too early after successful proof of concept or the signing of the first deal. Successful sales to innovation departments or first clients do not mean that the market is ready for scale.</p>
	<p>Losing the startup spirit In case the collaboration is getting too close and the dependency on corporation decision-making too strong, there is a high risk of losing the agile spirit of a startup, and with this also its attraction to the best minds involved.</p>

Which questions need to be solved to collaborate successfully (CHALLENGES)?

For corporations	For startups
<p>Not-invented-here problem It can be difficult for a corporation to internally adopt inventions that were developed in collaboration with startups. There is also a risk of competition with existing corporate innovation departments.</p>	<p>Duration of sales cycle Sales cycles of corporations conflict with the startup's short-term need to generate revenue. As startup teams are small, each bet on a corporate deal is a risk of running out of cash if the deal is lost in the end or the sales cycle takes too long.</p>

	This challenge must be addressed with a suitable sales approach.
<p>Shareholder expectations Corporations need to manage shareholder expectations, i.e. the trade-off between their short-term interest and long-term benefits of an investment strategy.</p>	<p>Inability to pitch to business units Business units are often either shielded by innovation departments or managers refuse to talk to startups. Startups should be able to navigate through the maze of the corporate organization, ensuring that they are speaking with the right unit or people to enable the execution of a collaboration.</p>
<p>Managerial support Collaborative innovation may fail due to a lack of senior management support. For long-term success, a strategic decision to foster innovation and making it a solid part of the business strategy is therefore a key ingredient.</p>	<p>Client's protective middle management Startup spirit clashes often with corporate culture, and middle-managers may be protective of their position in the company. How can startups adopt the corporate way of working without creating enemies?</p>
<p>Siloed approach Business units may not be aligned on a collaboration and its possible outcomes, which can lead to conflicting requirements and delays.</p>	<p>Insufficient resources Startups may be too small or lack the resources to handle the necessary processes. For example, when forming a partnership, the corporation has access to its legal department, while the startup has to rely on a relatively costly lawyer or even do the work themselves.</p>
<p>Understanding change Senior management needs to understand how new technologies may impact their business field in order to identify and/or develop relevant solutions. But senior management also has to be ready to adapt and throw overboard conventional and tested ways of thinking, i.e. be curious and open-minded.</p>	<p>Product decision and roadmap There is a trade-off between building a standard product and working towards the custom requirements of a corporation-client.</p>
<p>Innovative organization The culture of corporations is one in which even the appearance of failure has a heavy cost for those involved, and thus, unlike what happens in startups, failures are both avoided from the outset and not openly acknowledged when they happen. It is therefore a key challenge for C-Level managers to structure and sensitize their organization to take collaborative approaches seriously and give projects the support they need to become a success.</p>	<p>Gap between proof of concept and real projects There can be a huge gap between working with the corporation's innovation department on proof of concept at the start of a relationship and working with core business units after the trial run ends.</p>
	<p>Trust without references This is a chicken-and-egg problem: key corporation departments may not want to work with startups and their unproven products if they cannot provide references from previous corporation-clients.</p>

	<p>Free trials It is often said that the first five clients need to be served for free – or, at least, as partially paid trials – to get the sixth client to pay for the product. Corporations tend to require a lot of success stories before they buy, making it challenging to finance the startup in the beginning.</p>
	<p>Top-down approach Startups often feel treated in a top-down way instead of at eye level. They find it challenging to be perceived as serious businesses.</p>

As the CEO of the corporation Heliatek puts it:

“For the collaboration between corporations and startups, the following points are crucial: First, strategic alignment: If it is just a “nice to have” for the corporation, it will not work. Second, upper management commitment on both sides. Third, expectation management on both sides, especially on resources and timing. Corporations are not as agile as startups, and start-ups tend to over-commit. Fourth, regular upper management steering committee meetings. This will help to rapidly address any variance, hurdles or new situation arising from the cooperation (2018)”.

Now that we have on one side the models for corporations to innovate and from the other side the kind of collaboration the startups would need to support the launch of their products, their sales, and their growth, what is the most effective model for their collaboration?

Most effective model of collaboration

The literature reviewed mentions often that an intermediary in the innovation ecosystem is the best and most effective interactive space for collaboration between corporations and startups (Heratri & Klang, 2019; Ignite Sweden 2023; Blomquits. T., Gaim, M. & Nair, S., 2020; Mocker, V., Bielli, S. & Hailey, C. 2015.)

Having a good ecosystem of startups has proven to create a more efficient innovation cycle, utilize technology, supplement existing business models, and have quicker and more effective invention than corporations (Prats & Amigó, 2017), and an intermediary organisation (organisations offering startups services, such as an accelerator or an innovation center, etc.), not only have a better grasp of the landscape but also nurture and help to grow the startups, making these intermediary organisations a great interface for corporations.

These intermediary organisations understand better, probably than anybody in the ecosystem, the main drives for startups to collaborate with corporations: business development, access to resources, credibility and visibility, and scale-up. On the other hand, they also understand the drivers of the corporations: solve business problems, innovation, and gain strategic insight (Heratri & Klang, 2019).

We know that corporations often propose products they can make, not necessarily what customers want. Startups are likely to create new products from scratch while corporations are

better at continuous improvements and scaling proof of concepts. Therefore, both sides can offer two unique and equally significant offers to the table.

However, as mentioned earlier the collaboration is difficult and complex to achieve. Thus, **the intermediary organisation tends to be a trusted interlocutor between both sides and they can also ‘translate’ the corporations’ challenges into collaboration opportunities.** In addition, **the intermediary organisation knows well the mindsets, hierarchical structures, and pace at which both sides work.** Making them the perfect manager for this type of collaboration.

According to Heratri & Klang (2019) the key functions of the intermediary organisations for this type of collaboration are (but still without guaranteeing the establishment of the collaboration):

- **Connecting actors**
 - scanning potential startup partners for corporates and vice-versa
 - organising events where companies meet
 - facilitating the initial trust-building
- **Facilitators of the collaboration**
 - articulating the needs and requirements of the corporations
 - creations of shared rules and setting goals between and within both sides
 - finding the right people inside the corporations
 - supporting the partner which might be in a weaker position due to differing power balance (usually the startup)
- **Providing services**
 - concrete toolkits/programs for designing experiments and contracts regarding collaboration and intellectual property rights
 - project management support by finding ways forward (recommending milestones and deadlines, pushing with meetings) and ensuring progress (not letting timelines slip)
 - organising events where experiences and learnings are shared

Hence, the role of the intermediary organisation is much more significant with ecosystem level implications. As Blomquist et. al (2020) points out: *“Bringing fragmented actors together generates system-level outputs and creates value by enabling startups to scale fast and corporates to become innovative. Moreover, enabling startup–corporate interactions internationally national ecosystems can now interlink”*. One such successful experience is the one developed by Accelerace, whose program “Matchmaking corporates-startups” will be described in detail in the next Chapter 3.

3. Accelerace best practice

3.1. Introduction to Accelerace

Accelerace, it’s an accelerator established in Copenhagen in 2008 and is one of the leading accelerators in the Nordics (partly funded by the Danish Government and leading Danish and International corporations) to attract startup talents and create growth. They provide hard feedback so the clients learn how to transform a potentially not-so-good minimum viable prototype

(MVP) into a product-market fit. Accelerace has two main programs its accelerator program and its matchmaking corporate-startups.

Through their accelerator program, Accelerace has worked with more than 800 startups, which according to them 87% of their alumni have a survival rate, and 67% of them have raised capital. The program has 3 stages:

- 1) Pre-accelerator. Free-to-access pre-accelerator offers all founders immediate access to online courses about building a startup.
- 2) Accelerator. The 5-month, equity-free program helps promising Danish startups gear up for rapid scaling and investment (through selection based on personal interviews – not a pitch session.)
- 3) Investment. If the startup manages to impress Accelerace, they will invest in them before they even have customers, revenue or traction to get them further, faster.

Consequently, they provide standardized convertible loans using a standard document. The terms are market-conforming, meaning they are somewhat similar to offerings by other pre-seed-stage investors. What makes Accelerace different is that their acceleration program is 100% free and the entire investment (they provide 1 600 000 Kc approx. in convertible loan and they do 30 investments per year) is provided in real money.

The content of the accelerator program is centered around learning labs, workshops, mentoring and coaching that are tailored to the startup needs. They are a specialised scaling platform rather than a traditional acceleration program.

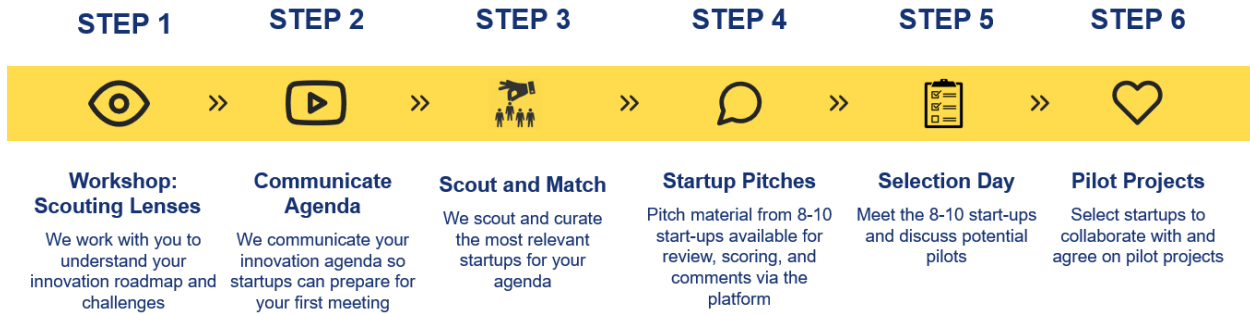
For Peter Torstensen, CEO, when looking for startups, they look for special features: accumulated knowledge, focus, adding resources, learning opportunities, and discipline. For Accelerace, the right startup sees the opportunity in a growing market where new customers enter frequently, they catch the transformation in the market, and they have a team with original insight.

Its second program, the matchmaking corporate-startups, provides an end-to-end solution for large firms, from ideation to startup partnerships through their engagement model. Accelerace helps communicate the corporation's innovation agenda; helps the corporation understand how and why to work with startups; and help to share the corporation's business units' roadmap and challenges to increase the chance of a successful implementation of a pilot project between both sides.

3.2 What is the Matchmaking Program?

A program designed to level the playing field for corporations and startups. A process with 6 steps supported by a digital platform develop by Accelerace.

Image 1. Accelerace Matchmaking process

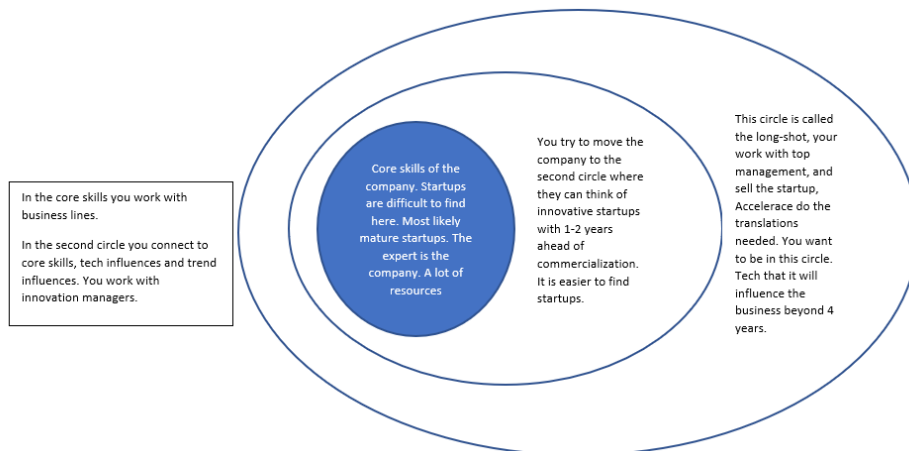


Source: Accelerace, 2023

Step 1. Workshop: Scouting lenses

First, the coordinator of the Matchmaking program at Accelerace approaches the key people with decision-making power, mandate, and budget (preferably CEOs) within large corporations to present their program, its scope, program stages, expectations, benefits, and potential results for the companies. **The program has a cost of 15,000 EUR and a duration of 3 months in total.** Once the corporation accepts Accelerace to act as the intermediary organisation for the collaboration, a workshop is scheduled to discuss:

- their core skills, and
- tech and trend influences that will impact the company business beyond 4 years.



Source: Accelerace training, 2023

It is important that in this first workshop to participate between 4-10 people:

- CEO
- innovation manager
- business unit managers

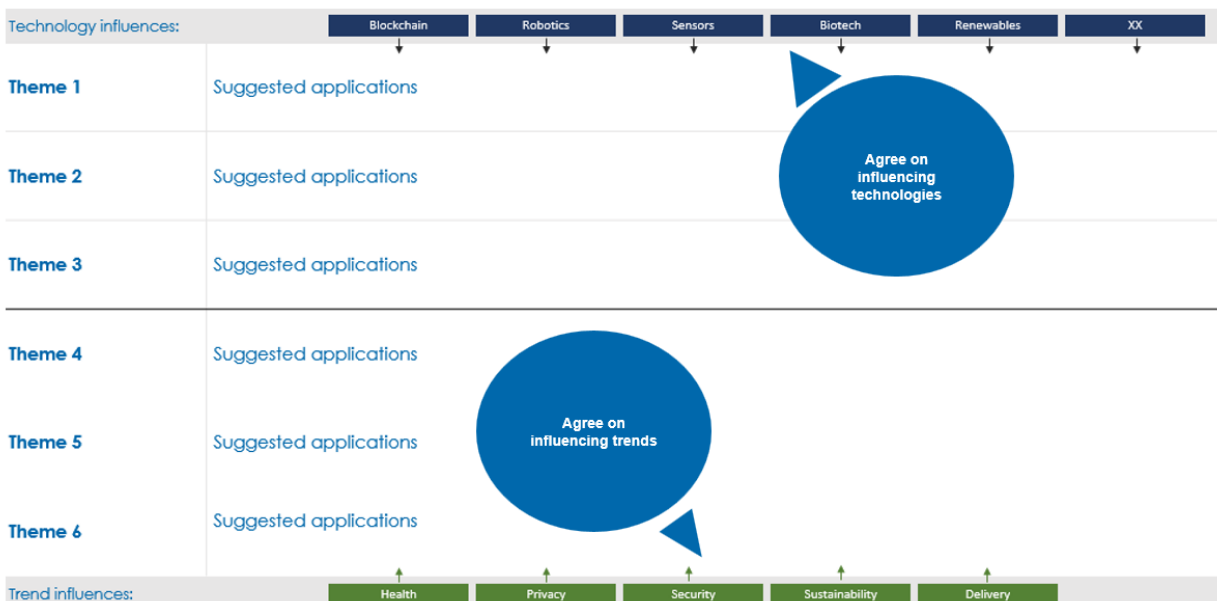
Accelerace brings into the workshop the matchmaking program coordinator, the scout manager, the marketing manager (optional), and an industry expert (optional). **They come already with sufficient knowledge about the corporation’s sector’s current market trends and emerging technologies (by analysing not only industry reports but the corporation’s strategies in terms of innovation and global reach).**

The goal of the workshop is to have as a result the right “lenses”, which means:

- clear reasons why the corporation wants to collaborate with the startup
- the need/challenge they want to solve
- describe in detail what they do, so their agenda can be properly communicated (understand their innovation roadmap)
- what they can offer to the startups
- an ambitious but realistic pilot project (**clarifying that the pilot project is a test of technology/services on a small scale and at this point the startup is not a normal supplier**).

Accelerace uses the following canvas to guide the corporation during the workshop:

Image 2. Canvas Technology/influence and trends influence



Source: Accelerace, 2023

In addition, 6 other lenses are discussed during the workshop to make a complete scouting briefing:

- Geography – particular regions the corporation prefer startups to be from (local, international).
- Maturity (full-time founders. MVP stage. Pre-series-A. (Open to pilots)
- Traction (does the startup have customers or not)
- Themes (topics result from the workshop)
- Partnership models (co-creation, pilot, PoC, investment, customer relationship)
- Non-focus (what the corporation doesn't want to see, or look for)

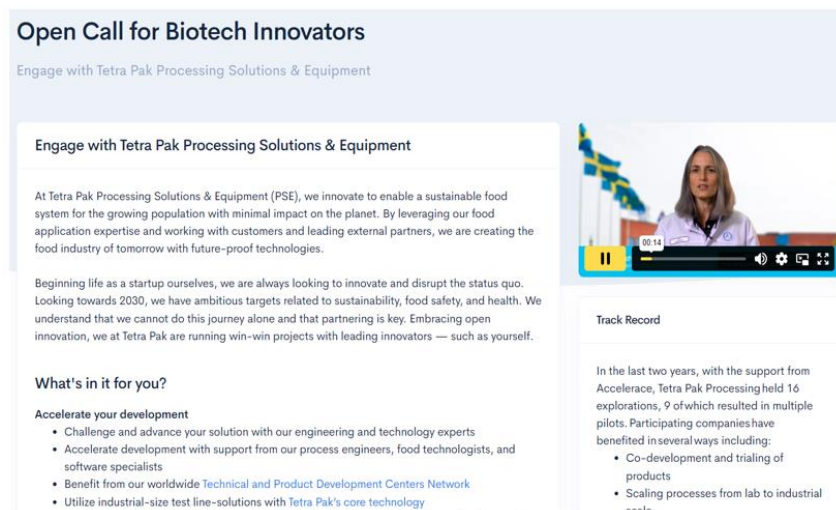
Accelerace advises the scout manager to record the workshop since many things are technical concepts, in this way he/she has access to what was discussed and can understand deeper and 'translate' it into a simple list of topics and sub-topics (lenses). This simpler description together with this list is later sent back to the corporation to confirm it and use it to communicate the agenda in Step 2.

Step 2. Communicate agenda

After the initial workshop, the communication between Accelerace and the corporation is done bi-weekly led by the scout manager at Accelerace. In this step, the call is drafted using an easy-to-fill template available in the Accelerace platform, to later open it in their platform and disseminated through different channels and reach out to other ecosystems. Also, equally important, with the guidance of Accelerace (through guided questions), **the corporation creates a video (through their marketing department) that will accompany the campaign explaining their internal challenge and what they offer to the startups through collaboration. Accelerace would normally make edits to those videos to later add the branding to them.** Some of the questions that should be answered in the video are:

- How do we facilitate innovation with startups?
- What facilities do we have available?
- Why are we collaborating with startups?
- What startups can provide for specific areas?

Image 3. Example of the call and corporation videos



Source: Accelerace, 2023

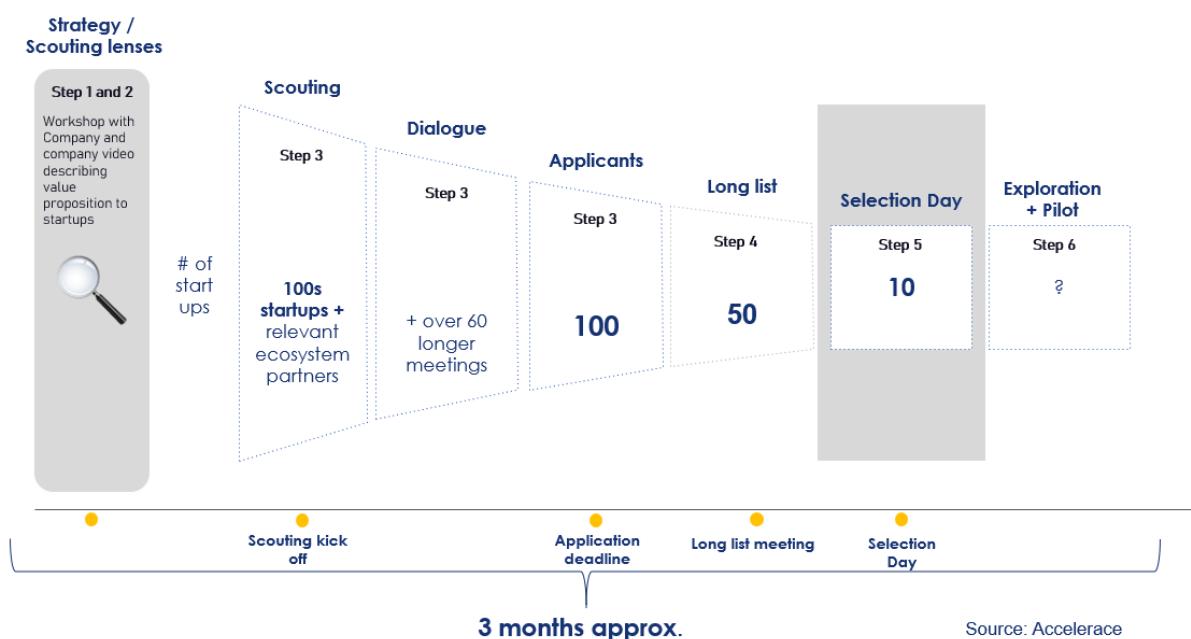
Step 3. Scout and Match

This step is **the most important role that Accelerace plays, it's what they call the "curation of startups"** and lasts approximately 3 months. Accelerace does this process using a funnel approach to reach out to hundreds of startups to invite them to apply to narrow it down to 10 startups to bring them to pitch day.

Accelerace uses different tools for the scouting process:

- **open databases and CRM system**, such as Affinity which utilize relationship intelligence based on team activity and networking to help venture capitalists leverage their network potential and find and manage customer relationships.
- **Leverage Networks and Platforms**, such as past projects and partnerships; industry conferences and events; online networking platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp and Discord groups); open innovation platforms, such as InnoCentive or NineSights; and other incubators, accelerators, VCs.
- **Online scouting platforms**: Crunchbase, Tracxn, AngelList, CB Insight, Startup Grind, PitchBook, Funderbeam, StartUp Health, Seedtable, Owler, DataFox, Mattermark, Gust, 500 Startups, EquityNet, Venture Source, Tech Crunch, Innoget, Pitchup, etc.

Image 4. Accelerace strategy



In parallel, the scout manager starts an **email campaign using the platform Snov.io for prospecting and cold outreach**. The main bits of advice from Accelerace during this step are:

- always contact the startup directly to apply. Don't expect that the ecosystem partners will do it on your behalf, they are usually very busy
- write short and direct emails. Use bullet points, no one has time to read more than 15 sentences in one email

- send 3 to 4 emails during a 2 months period
- be available. Reply fast. Leave your phone number in your signature. Provide scheduling meeting links, if needed

Due diligence

As part of Accelerace services, **due diligence is an essential aspect of building trust with the corporation. According to Accelerace, for example, from 100 startups that you reached out to with the email campaign, you want those you spot as good applicants, thus, normally in the case of Accelerace they set up meetings with 60 startups to invite them directly to apply.**

Due diligence involves a comprehensive investigation to ensure that the startup is a viable and trustworthy partner. **This process is done by 2-3 people in Accelerace and helps mitigate risks and make informed decisions.** Here are key aspects to consider:

- *Financial stability:* review the startup's financial statements, including revenue, expenses, and funding history. Assess their financial stability and ability to deliver on commitments.
- *Legal compliance:* ensure the startup complies with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements. Check for any pending litigation or issues that might pose legal risks.
- *Team background:* evaluate the experience and expertise of the startup's leadership team. A strong, capable team is often a good indicator of a startup's potential for success.
- *Intellectual Property (IP):* verify the status of the startup's intellectual property. Ensure they have appropriate protections in place for their innovations.
- *Capabilities and resources:* discuss the startup's capabilities, resources, and technical expertise. Ensure they have the necessary skills and resources to meet the requirements of the pilot program.
- *Willingness to collaborate:* gauge the startup's enthusiasm and willingness to collaborate. Assess their commitment to the partnership and their openness to feedback and iteration.
- *Clarify expectations:* communicate clearly the expectations for the collaboration. Discuss timelines, deliverables, and any specific requirements to ensure both parties are on the same page.

Step 4. Startup pitches (Long listing)

After careful due diligence, reviewing startup pitches (decks, videos, etc.), and constant communication with the startups, Accelerace curates the startups and brings the ones (10-15) with the most potential to be scored by the corporations. This step lasts two weeks. On the Accelerace platform, from the side of the corporation, they can comment and score the startup applications. The corporation can either comment on the application and assign a score (left image), or they can score according to the set agreed criteria (right image).

Image 5. Options of scoring by corporations

Application scoring
This is where you can look at the scores of this application - and score the application yourself in the bottom. Further, you can see the average score in the box below.

Applicant	Score
Hamid Ghanbari 19. September 2023, 11:11 - Reducing emissions and providing added value by product for TP customer - Large scale facility - Ready organisation for cooperation	5
Ulrika Brintje 19. September 2023, 12:05 This one would be great to hear more about. Sustainability (CO2 emitted from industrial process, food production, fermentation: free feedstock to use) combined with co-located facility with Photo-Bio reactor system, to produce high value ingredients. Demo facility in place. Interesting high value ingredients eg NDvo protein (egg white replacer), future ones (concentrates, isolates). Have JV partner as ABInBev. Innovation team with interesting background. Well pitched presentation.	5
Lily Li 19. September 2023, 12:28 CO2 capture, and also with the commercial brands, looking forward	4

Peter Marculars
21. February 2023, 02:14 | Updated at 25. February 2023, 17:19
While in general this is a big problem for society, not sure how big it is for water utility companies (at least right now). The mentioned regulation may change that though. Selling to water utilities will prob be very difficult and slow. The market is very small right now, so even with high cagr, the opportunity size might be limited.

Criteria	Score
Problem The severity, magnitude and frequency of the problem the product solves	4
Scalability The growth rate of the problem and pool of potential customers	2
Timing The forces in technology, legislation, or customer preference that makes the timing favorable?	4
Progress The speed of which the startup has progressed since inception, and this is currently progressing	5
Solution/product/service The novelty and value of the product solution/product/service.	4
Female founders Do they have a female founder?	0

Source: Accelerace, 2023

After the scoring is completed, Accelerace arranges a 2-hour meeting with the corporation to discuss the results and the potential startups. In this meeting is decided which startups will be invited to selection day, and Accelerace provides the feedback to the startups. The goal of the long listing is to shorten the list of startups from 50 to 10-12 startups with whom Accelerace will work closer to prepare them for the selection day.

Step 5. Selection Day

Two weeks before the selection day, Accelerace communicates with the selected startups and asks them for the following:

- A 5-minute video pitch consisting of two sections:
 - Company pitch (3-4 minutes) describing what the startup does, how it operates, revenue generation, team expertise, achievements, and upcoming plans.
 - Pilot/partnership suggestions (1 minute) explaining why the startup wants to collaborate with the corporation, how it aligns with its roadmap, and propose pilot/partnership ideas.
 - Recommendations: use a screen recording of the startup's pitch deck with voiceover. Web tools: www.loom.com or <https://screencast-o-matic.com/>
- Create PDF with startup info, pitch deck, and their application and send it to the corporation a minimum of one week before the selection day.

The idea is to improve their presentation skills, sometimes they even do training sessions to make sure the startup videos answer the challenges from the corporation.

Selection Day

Selection day usually takes up to 5 hours with a 15-minutes time slot for each startup (5 minutes video, 8 minutes Q&As, and 2 minutes for the audience vote – using slido or mentimeter platforms). The selection day can be physical or online. Accelerace suggests that selection day should be opened for everyone at the corporation and to invite C-level management team. Accelerace also strongly suggests making sure that startups don't know each other and keep their privacy as much as possible (which is easier in an online setting).

An example of the agenda for selection day could look like this:

12:30 - 12:45	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda for the day Overview of startups Process for the selection 	
12:45 - 13:45	Startup presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minute pitch 8 minute Q&A 2 minute for the audience to vote 	4X
13:45 - 14:00	coffee break		
14:00 - 14:45	Startup presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minute pitch 8 minute Q&A 2 minute for the audience to vote 	3X
14:45 - 15:30	lunch break		
15:30 - 16:00	Startup presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minute pitch 8 minute Q&A 2 minute for the audience to vote 	2X
16:00 - 16:15	coffee break		
16:15 - 17:00	Startup presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 minute pitch 8 minute Q&A 2 minute for the audience to vote 	3X
17:00 - 17:15	Results and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results from voting rounds Final selection Next steps 	

Source: Accelerace, 2023

During the startup presentations, the key people from the corporation have to keep track of the reasons for selection:

Start up	Pilot Implementation Responsible	Reasons for selection/ Aim to achieve
		#1 Reason #2 Reason #3 Reason
		#1 Reason #2 Reason #3 Reason
		#1 Reason #2 Reason #3 Reason
		#1 Reason #2 Reason #3 Reason

Source: Accelerace 2023

At the end of the selection day, Accelerace and the corporation discuss the final results and announce the selected startup/s.

Step 6. Pilot project

During this step sometimes Accelerace participates or not. That is up to the corporation to decide, if they do, it is for an extra fee. **Regardless of their participation, Accelerace provides a structure for the next steps to implement the pilot project.**

1. **Exploration meetings**
 - a. Where and when?
 - b. Who? Corporation team responsible for the pilot and startup
2. **Define clear objectives**

- a. Clearly articulate what you aim to achieve through the pilot project. This could be testing a new product, entering a new market, or enhancing a specific business process.
- 3. Set measurable metrics**
 - a. Establish KPIs that align with your objectives. These metrics will be used to evaluate the results of the pilot.
- 4. Scope and timeline**
 - a. Clearly define the scope of the pilot, including the specific tasks or projects the startup will undertake. Set a realistic timeline for the pilot to ensure sufficient time for meaningful results.
- 5. Resource allocation**
 - a. Allocate the necessary resources, both in terms of personnel and budget, to support the startup during the pilot phase.
- 6. Communication and collaboration**
 - a. Establish effective communication channels between your team and the startup. Foster a collaborative environment to encourage open dialogue and feedback.
- 7. Risk mitigation**
 - a. Identify potential risks and challenges that may arise during the pilot. Develop a contingency plan to mitigate these risks and ensure a smooth implementation.

If Accelerace is not part of the collaboration, one month after the selection day Accelerace does a follow-up with the corporation to see how the implementation of the pilot project is going. With the startup, Accelerace uses its example as a showcase.

If Accelerace is involved in the collaboration, they help manage the expectations on both sides and help define the pilot project (which they called Proof of Concept, PoC), the activities and deadline.

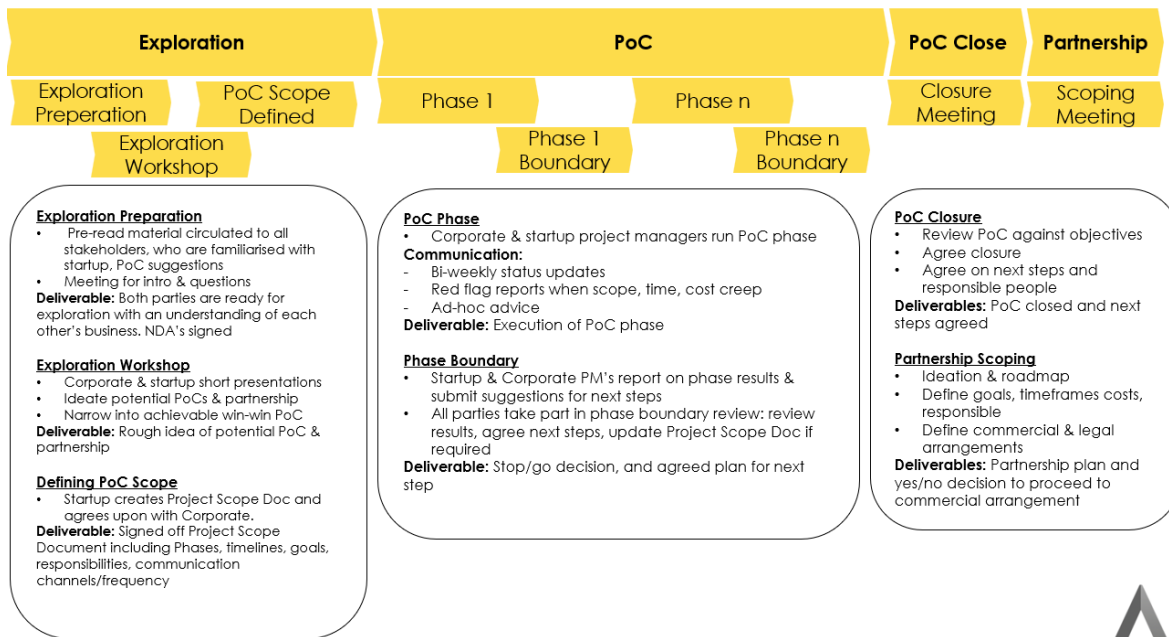
Image 6. Accelerace approach to pilot projects between the corporation and the startup

Defining the PoC: Activities, deliveries and deadlines ▲

Start up name: Date: Participants and roles:	Purpose of PoC: Scope, clear goals and deliverables, collaboration model, resources and budgets, etc.	Overall timeline and milestones: Max 3 clear milestones – no longer than 6 months timeline.	KPIs: Agree on what a success is beforehand: KPIs – metrics, analysis and effort tracking?		
Stakeholders – Executors – who does what, how many hours/week, roles, responsibilities?					
Actions:	Deliveries:	Deadline:	Responsible:	Participants:	Comments:
Barriers and risks and how to mitigate: Check challenges/barriers and Risk - suggest mitigation. E.g. check legal, financial issues		Other issues: Contract –clauses on geography, exclusivity			

Source: Accelerace, 2023

Image 7. Accelerace implementation of pilot project



Source: Accelerace, 2023

From this approach, it is important to highlight the following:

- Accelerace encourages both sides to understand better each other's business.
- Sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) before the start of the collaboration.
- Facilitate a workshop to define the scope of the pilot, activities, timeline, and communication frequency (normally check-ins every 2 weeks).
- Let the collaboration run advising to keep an open communication and review of results to decide if it is a stop/go decision to move to the next stages.
- Once the collaboration reaches its completion, review the pilot against the initial objectives. Discuss a potential partnership plan (yes/no) to go over commercial and legal arrangements.

The result of a pilot project is not necessarily a contract between the startup and the corporation. Hence, Accelerace (or the corporation) should ensure background and future IP that allow for the startup to not lose traction if the corporation partner does not want to progress after the pilot.

3.3 Method's strengths and challenges

Strengths

The strengths of the Accelerace program are the value propositions it creates for both, the startups and the corporations.

Value proposition for the corporation

- Trust partner with knowledge of the ecosystem and large database of startups
- Help in creating clear objectives and criteria (lenses/scope) for a pilot project

- Curated startups
- No generic pitches
- Access to the right technology

Value proposition for the startups

- Through this program the startup is pushed to the right opportunity of growth in whatever phase they are in.
- An opportunity to collaborate with a large firm and access new equipment, resources, and perhaps clients.
- Unique access to understanding the corporate mindset and working structure with the support of an intermediary organisation.

Accelerace Platform

Another strength that Accelerace offers is its platform. The way we can understand their platform is in layers:

Layer 1. Theory and frameworks (foundational layer) Beta and Alpha versions

Layer 2. Digital acceleration (interface) which puts Accelerace theory and frameworks into learning paths for startups and premium content for partners.

Layer 3. Tailor content (enables configuration) of the learning paths. The courses and tools can be modified and added to and all of it can be managed and monitored.

Layer 4. Digital program management that enables program and event management, including enrollment, courses and workshops, a startup dashboard, and interactive tools.

Image 8. Accelerace platform



Source: Accelerace, 2023

From the startup perspective the platform can be used for:

- Enrollment. Applications or enrollment form to any program on the platform with prefill fields.
- Courses and workshops. Access to proprietary courses, lessons and workshops specifically designed for pre-traction startups (progress and momentum). Build your own learning journeys based on the program.
- Startup dashboard. Each startup sees their own personal dashboard with program progress, message boards, event signups, course access and much more.
- Team management. Each startup can invite all their team members to ensure that knowledge is deeply anchored into each team member and that important conversations happen as early as possible.
- Interactive tools. Some of the most beneficial tools for pre-traction startups include the investor curator, pitch deck heaven, pitch deck sharing tool, valuation calculator and many more.

From the program management perspective, the platform allows you to:

- Program Management. Manage the program with all aspects in your own program management platform, from content, benefits and mentors to application, scoring and screening.
- Cohorts and phases. Divide the program into phases and cohorts with separate mentors and startups in each. Control the content and communication based on program progress.
- Events. Control all events, from small sessions to huge events with several hundred participants. Control signups and speed-dating sessions directly on the platform.
- Organisation management. Attach the full organisation to the program, attached as either mentors or program managers. Or both.
- Mentor attachment. Attach mentors to each startup, either as scorers of their application or as attached mentors for longer engagement and mentorship of each startup.

Image 9. Accelerace platform: examples of structures



Source: Accelerace, 2023

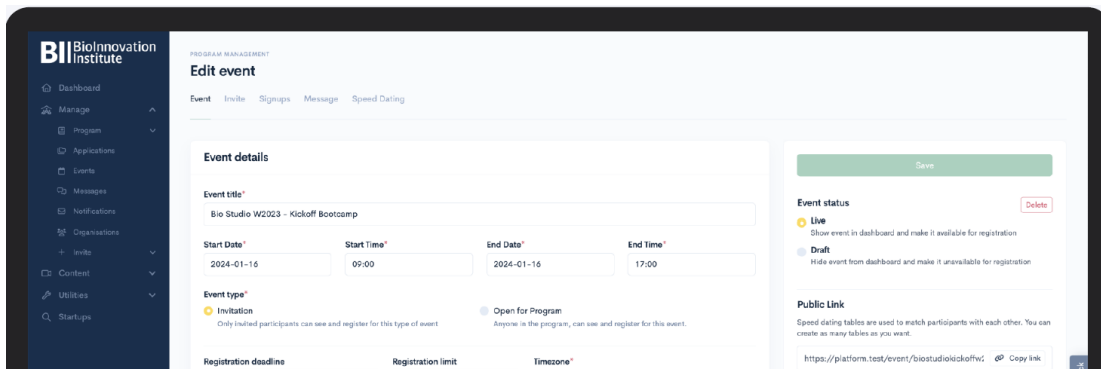
Image 10. Accelerace platform: examples of structures



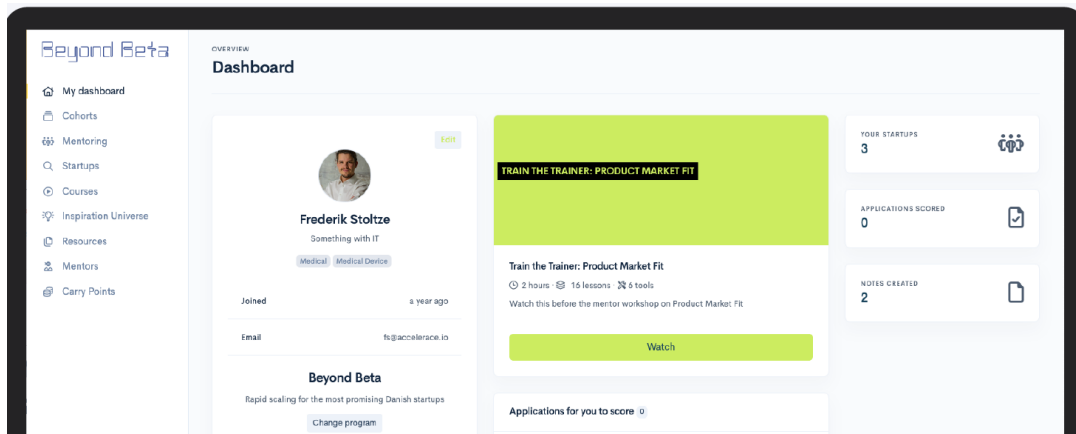
Source: Accelerace, 2023

Images 11. Accelerace platform interfaces

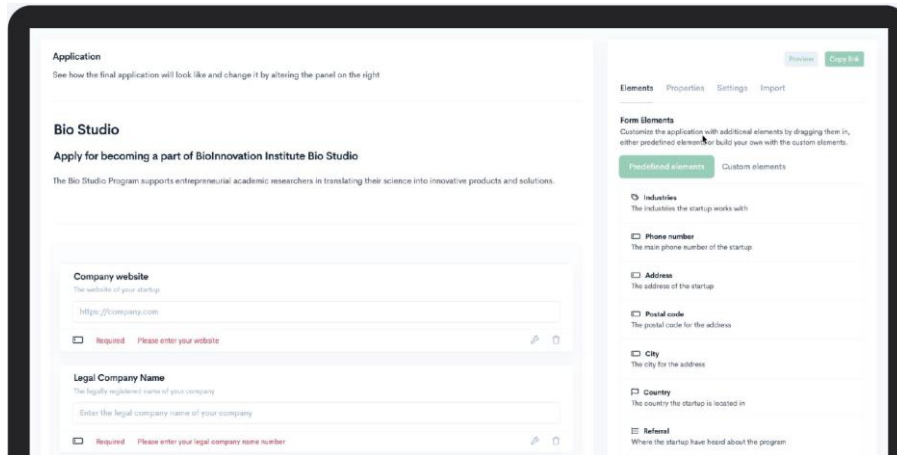
Organisation of organisation



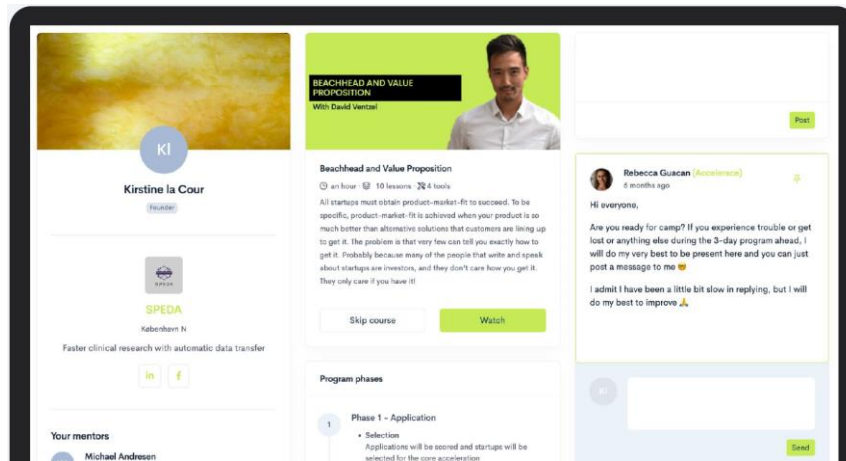
Mentors dashboard



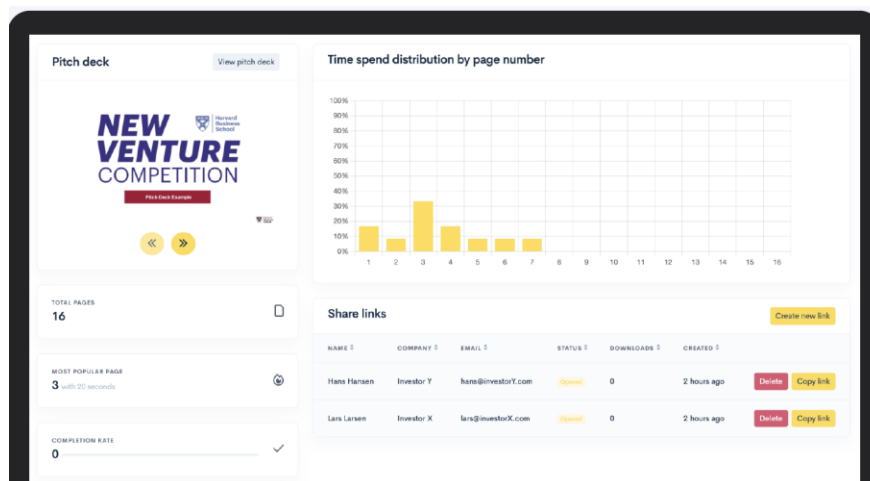
Application builder



Startup dashboard



Pitch deck sharing tool



Source: Accelerace, 2023

Program challenges

According to Accelerace: *“the reality is the corporation uses this program to see what is in the market, although many of the projects don’t end in pilot projects, this can be because the corporation is not ready or it is very complicated to implement such pilot projects”*.

Thus, what is part of the essential aspects for both sides to make a successful match are:

Startups		Corporations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Understand very well the challenge of the area of the corporation’s business unit/line of production, etc.○ Do a tailor-made presentation, understand it's not a pitch day for investment.	Match	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Open to collaboration○ Figure out the way to implement the solution

According to Accelerace, a few things can be improved:

- Rate the companies in their engagement with startups
- The startups that are not selected, keep them engaged with other opportunities (investment, training, coaching, etc.

4. Implementation possibilities for SIC

4.1 Description of the pilot project

SIC is interested in running a pilot project using the same approach as Accelerace. In Central Bohemia 1% of the companies are considered large firms, nevertheless, they account for almost 75% of the regional economic output and 60% of the jobs in the business sector. Most of SIC services are designed for startups or SMEs, thus, **this pilot project would allow SIC to offer a service targeted for large firms that are not available in the regional ecosystem and a great opportunity to build trust with these key actors.**

The goal of the pilot project is to go over the same system as Accelerace to find out what are their internal challenges that can be solved by testing a solution through a collaboration with a startup (from our ecosystem or abroad).

If a corporation shows interest in a pilot project, this could be the approach to develop based on the Accelerace learning.

Team setup and responsibilities

- SIC CEO and the Head of the Business Support Team. Coordinators for the pilot project, and responsible for approaching the large firms to offer the service of Matchmaking and facilitate the initial workshop to define the lenses and develop each of the six steps of the Accelerace process.

- Jr. Analyst. The role includes the scouting of startups following the same process as Accelerace.
- Marketing specialist. The role is to help create the corporate videos that will be used for the call, create the microsite and disseminate the call.

Step 1 - Workshop: Scouting lenses

When approaching a large firm that has no or little experience collaborating with startups, **is essential to present the program benefits, the time duration (3 months), the fee (*that should be paid as a contract service by the company and avoid subsidizing with public money the pilot project meant for large corporations*), the layout of the contract/order request, and the potential NDA, before starting the official meeting where the lenses will be defined.** It would be important to go over the questions that would confirm to the corporation that there is a good opportunity for such collaboration, these questions could be:

- How do you make your organisation more innovative and willing to take risks?
- How do you create internal awareness of new market trends and emerging technologies?
- How do you position your company as an innovation-driven partner, customer or employer?
- How does your company solve key business problems in a quicker and more cost-effective way?
- How does your company capture the power of cutting-edge, disruptive technologies?

Once the corporation is confirmed for the pilot project, **SIC CEO and the Head of the Business Support team would facilitate the workshop following the tech and trend influences canvas and the 6 specific lenses from Accelerace:**

- Geography – particular regions the corporation prefer startups to be from (local, international).
- Maturity (full-time founders. MVP stage. Pre-series-A. (Open to pilots)
- Traction (does the startup have customers or not)
- Themes (topics result from the workshop)
- Partnership models (co-creation, pilot, PoC, investment, customer relationship)
- Non-focus (what the corporation doesn't want to see, or look for)

Depending on the topic and industry sector, an external expert would join the workshop, together with the marketing specialist and the Jr. Analyst.

The aim of the workshop it to have one or two lenses defined, as the example below:

Image 12. Example of scouting lenses from a corporation from the dairy industry

Ingredients lens	Sustainability lens
<p>For this year's partnership, Tetra Pak is looking for companies that can provide one or more of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Affordable high nutritional ingredients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Alternative ingredients to the high protein from dairy (it can be hybrid versions, as tasteful as, as nutritional as) ◦ Affordable fibers ◦ Affordable oils and ingredients with mind boost claim (Memory, energy, reasoning) 2. Upcycled nutritional / functional ingredients (Waste/sustainability/affordability): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Nutritional/functional ingredients from upcycled raw material (not in scope: whey, BSG, Orange peel, or any vastly known upcycled ingredient) ◦ New food and beverage upcycling technologies 3. Ingredients to solve the plant based nutritional bioavailability problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ingredients to be used in the same recipe, that way improving protein bioavailability and digestion in human body. E.g. Phytate to improve bioavailability through phytase activation 4. Marine nutritional ingredients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ In the scope: protein, rich oils, fibers and other nutritional aspects ◦ Out of the scope: any type of gum. 	<p>For this year's partnership, Tetra Pak is looking for companies that can provide one or more of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solutions and measurements for minimizing product loss for food processing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Knowing the amount of losses (measurement) ◦ Method of calculation and optimizing it ◦ Technical solutions to minimize product losses 2. Solutions for side-stream reuse/recycling/recovery in bioreactors waste stream from processing food*: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Large scale water recovery ◦ Side-stream reuse in the process or reuse as raw materials for another product 3. Solutions for using CO2 or ingredients/nutrients made from food waste or other waste as upstream substrate for bioreactors (precision fermentation/biomass fermentation) 4. Solutions for decarbonization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Especially the plant wide integrations with for example solar pv, solar thermal and heat pumps, electrical boilers, etc.

Source: Accelerace, 2023

Image 13. Example of the 6 specific lenses from a corporation from the construction sector

Geography	Primarily Danish startups. Secondarily Northern Europe. (English language required)
Maturity stage	Full time founders. MVP stage. Pre series-A. (Open to pilots)
Traction	Some traction in related/other/parallel industries okay
Themes	[Input text]
Partnership models	Pilot projects in real construction projects with business units.
Non focus (themes)	Building materials, ERP

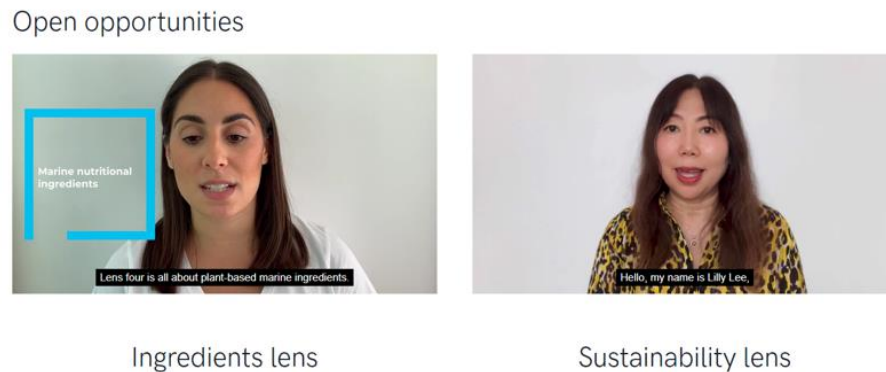
Source: Accelerace, 2023

Step 2. Communicate agenda

With the lenses defined, the **Head of the Business Support Team** would draft the call that would be disseminated. From the marketing side, **the marketing specialist** would create a **list of questions for the corporation should answer in a 2-minute video to communicate their reasons to collaborate that will go together with the call:**

- How do we facilitate innovation with startups?
- What facilities do we have available?
- Why are we collaborating with startups?
- What startups can provide for specific areas?

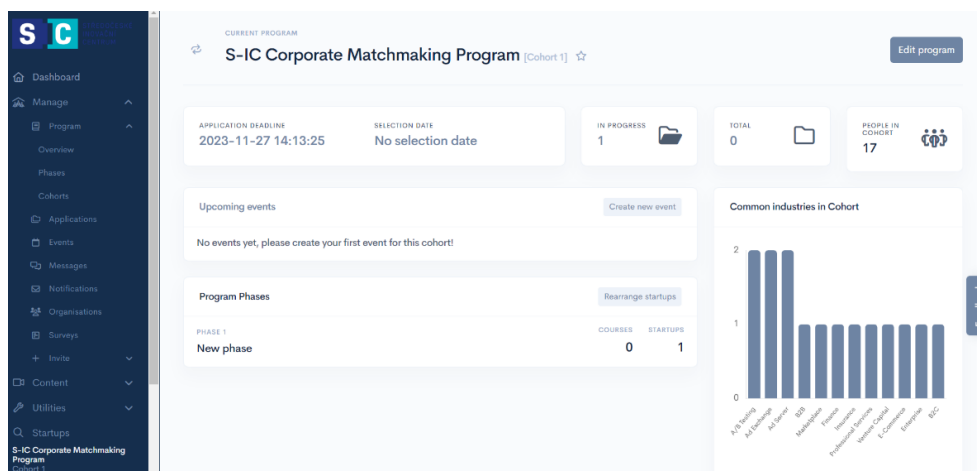
Image 14. Example of videos made by a corporation from the dairy industry



Source: Accelerace, 2023

In this step, the use of the Accelerace platform can be used to fill in a pre-defined call-template, open the call, applicants registration, manage the cohort, scoring, prepare the startups for evaluation day, etc. And as mentioned before the interface could use the SIC logo with prior agreement with Accelerace.

Image 15. Example of the Accelerace platform used by SIC



Source: Accelerace, 2023

In case the Accelerace platform is not used, the SIC team working on the pilot project could develop a different approach:

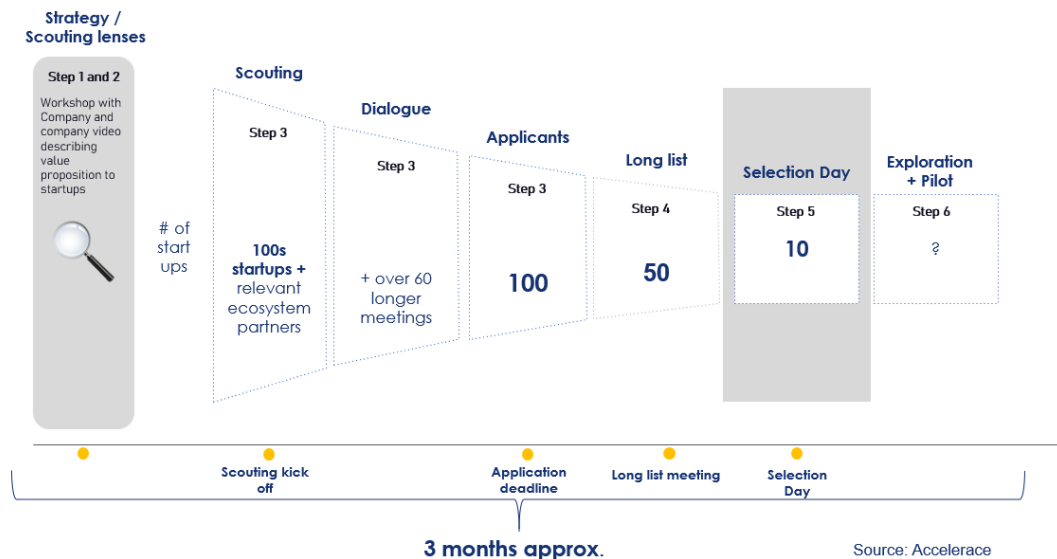
- Opening a microsite on the SIC website to open the call (similar to other SIC programs, such as Startup Now, INOEX, etc.)
- Use Google Forms for the registration of startups
- Use a shared Excel file with the corporation to manage the cohort and scoring
- Direct email communication and online meetings with the selected startups to prepare them for the selection day

Step 3. Scout and Match

Once the call is open, **the aim is to follow the funnel approach and reach out to hundreds of startups using different channels of communication and connections with other innovation ecosystems to achieve 80-100 startups applying to the program.**

The Jr. Analyst would use the different tools for the scouting process advised by Accelerace:

- Email campaign (using ECO mail, the platform already used by SIC)
- open databases
- networks and platforms
- online scouting platforms: Crunchbase, Tracxn, AngelList, CB Insight, Startup Grind, PitchBook, Funderbeam, StartUp Health, Seedtable, Owler, DataFox, Mattermark, Gust, 500 Startups, EquityNet, Venture Source, Tech Crunch, Innoget, Pitchup, etc.



In coordination with the Head of Business Support, the Jr. Analyst will then **choose those startups that appear to be aligned with the criteria of the company, run due diligence on them (according to Accelerace check-list in section 3.2) to help mitigate risks and make informed decisions, to later reach out directly to them to invite them to apply.**

Step 4. Startup pitches (Long listing)

Whether using Accelerace platform or what SIC management decides to use (microsite, Excel files, etc.), the coordinator of the pilot project will curate the startups with the most potential (long listing of 30-50 startups) for the corporation team to access the startups' pitch decks and their

details. In this step, the corporation team will comment on the startups' applications and assign a score

- After the scoring is completed, SIC will arrange a 2-hour meeting with the corporation to discuss the results and which startups they will invite to the selection day. Ideally between 10 and 12 startups.
- SIC will provide the feedback to the startups.
- SIC will work closer with the selected startups to prepare them for the selection day.

Step 5. Selection Day

Following Accelerace method, 2-weeks before the selection day, SIC will ask the startups for:

- A 5-minute video pitch consisting of two sections:
 - Company pitch (3-4 minutes) describing what the startup does, how it operates, revenue generation, team expertise, achievements, and upcoming plans.
 - Pilot/partnership suggestions (1 minute) explaining why the startup wants to collaborate with the corporation, how it aligns with its roadmap, and propose pilot/partnership ideas.
 - Recommendations: use a screen recording of the startup's pitch deck with voiceover. Web tools: www.loom.com or <https://screencast-o-matic.com/>
- Create PDF with startup info, pitch deck, and their application and send it to the corporation a minimum of one week before the selection day.

If some of the startups need more support to refine their presentation, SIC can provide additional mentoring with internal and/or external mentoring from SIC programs, particularly, from SIC's network of experts that have worked with startups.

In this step, SIC also would want to meet the startup needs in terms of presentation skills for the corporation and encourage them to focus on:

- This is not an investor pitch, they need to answer how they could solve the corporation's challenges.
- Gaining a potential large corporation as a lead customer that can help them to scale up.
- This is a winning approach as it saves money and time for both the startup and the corporations.

Selection Day

For the selection day, the advice is also to follow the structured agenda from Accelerace (section 3.2):

- **5 hours with a 15-minute time slot for each startup (5 minutes video, 8 minutes Q&As, and 2 minutes for the audience vote – using Slido or Mentimeter platforms).**
- The selection day can be **physical or online**.
- Open for everyone at the corporation and to invite the C-level management team.
- Keep startup privacy as much as possible (easier in an online setting).
- Create a form for the corporation team responsible for the pilot project implementation to keep track of the reasons for selection that should include: the name of the startup, the

name of the person responsible for the pilot project, and the reasons for selecting the startup.

At the end of the selection day, SIC and the corporation will discuss the final results and announce the selected startup/s.

Step 6. Pilot project

With some luck, the corporation would ask SIC to assist in the coordination between the startup and the corporation for the implementation of the pilot project. SIC would bring its experience and understanding that languages and goals from the corporation and startups could be different, thus, SIC could be the right player to do the 'translation job'.

In either case, SIC could share the structure for the next steps following the approach of Accelerace (see section 3.2):

- Exploration meetings
- Define clear objectives
- Set measurable metrics
- Scope and timeline
- Resource allocation
- Communication and collaboration
- Risk mitigation plan

4.2 Impact on the regional innovation ecosystem

Large corporations are key actors in any innovation ecosystem, they tend to provide much of the economic output and create a large number of jobs, and it is probably because of these same reasons that services targeted at them are not as common as for small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and startups. Furthermore, their entrepreneurial culture tends to be more conservative and respond to self-interest, and their siloed activities also make it complicated to design the best service/product for them.

However, understanding how a specific corporation innovates (through a flat model, a dedicated innovation unit, a separate corporation incubator, an external subsidiary, or through a spin-off, see section 2.1) and their organisational structure are the most important things in order to offer them a service that could be of their interest and benefit. Hence, the service of matchmaking corporations – startups is a great way to bring a win-win scenario for both sides.

One of the most important impacts of the collaboration between these two target groups on the regional ecosystem would be the interactions and connectivity that could result from it. By interacting with domestic startups, the corporation could create a stepping stone for them to reach their next stage of growth or scale-up, and because of the size of the large corporation, they can be a pull-in force for foreign startups and create a visibility of the regional ecosystem that SIC can take advantage of and tap on this market segment.

The role of SIC would be essentially to try to create these connections. By articulating the needs of the corporation and scouting and curating the startups that can potentially solve the corporation's challenges would build trust with these big players. And that trust could have a spillover effect in the sense that next time SIC organises events in the area of entrepreneurship

these large firms could be sponsors and supporters of SIC programs making it a two-way relationship.

4.3. Communication strategy

As for reaching out to the target audience, these are some strategies that Accelerace advised to follow:

- When opening the call to attract startups to collaborate with a specific corporation, it is necessary to agree with the company about who could help send the message for greater reach, and ambassador if you will. Somebody with a proven track record and sufficient influence who can share the content in his/her channels that could create traction in spreading the information.
- Make teasers advertising the call 2-3 weeks before it opens to make people listen to the main message, then every 2-3 days re-use content.
- Time matters: Tuesday to Thursday are the best days. Twitter is best to post between 9 am and 11 am, and LinkedIn and Instagram between 8 am and 8:30 am.
- No matter the medium (platform) used the message/content has to be of **high** quality in a saturated market of content.
- Create brief videos from previous startups that have experience collaborating with corporations and share them with the call.
- Agree with the corporation if a cross-branding promotional campaign makes sense, but avoid 'muddying' SIC brand.
- Use keywords like 'success' and everything in between.

Overall, the **messages SIC would want to make and share are the value propositions of each party.**

- **For corporations:** SIC is an innovation channel for corporation partners, that enjoy credibility in the startup community and can bring benefits to corporations including access to such community.
- **For startups:** "we will push you to the right opportunity". The value proposition for startups is created by the corporations. That is why the videos that the corporation makes to promote the collaboration have to be attractive.

Finally, it is important to align from within (SIC and corporation) with respect to the communication strategy, evaluate and adjust accordingly.

4.4. Main and alternative financing resources

The main source of funding for the matchmaking program must come from the corporation, not only because is better to avoid using public funding for a private company, but also is one of the key ingredients for a successful collaboration with a startup.

For the corporation to have an allocated budget for the collaboration with a startup would also indicate its commitment to cooperating and developing a proof of concept and not the simple scanning of what is out there in terms of technology without fully engaging.

Thus, it is important for SIC when ‘sealing the deal’ with the corporation (not the initial workshop), to be clear about the cost and fee that must be covered by the contracted service, this should include the working hours of the SIC team involved in the program and any external consultant that might be required for the definition of the lenses.

4.5. Sustainability and risk mitigation

For this best practice to become sustainable it would be necessary to incorporate it within SIC services provided to large corporations and for them to cover the cost of human resources time invested in the program. For this purpose, it is necessary that during and after the pilot project correctly calculate how many working hours per team member position were invested to complete the project. This would give a clear picture of the cost that SIC could cover through contractual services.

The pilot project would also serve as a showcase for other corporations with a message that SIC unlocks collective potential, enables learning, and helps participating startups and corporates to grow.

To mitigate risks:

- Iterate periodically with the corporation to make sure the pilot project is following the planned timeline and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Weekly meetings among the SIC team involved in the pilot project for planning, alignment, analysis, and deliverables.
- Facilitate communication, information sharing, and document management among the SIC team members and the corporate representatives.
- Request the client (corporation) their feedback on the project performance at the end to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.

5. Conclusions

As explained in this DOP, corporations, and startups are very different types of organisations, with different processes, timing, and cultures that can be as incompatible as they can be complementary. When deploying this type of activity (pilot projects between corporations and startups), on the one hand, SIC needs to analyse and identify those corporations open to collaboration and confirm they have the budget and a way to implement the solution from the selected startup, in other words, that this is not only a technology scout for them.

On the other hand, SIC needs to find those startups that are in the phase ready to engage with a corporation for two reasons, one, because it makes sense in their scalability, and two, because they understand very well the challenge of the area of the corporation’s business unit/line of production, etc. is facing and have a solution for it. Matching these factors, plus having flexibility, open-mindedness, and a constructive dialogue, not only the pilot could have better chances to succeed but could lead to true innovation.

Furthermore, creating a publicly visible, single access point for startups (website) where they will find complete information about the corporation and its operations, what are the benefits they offer to the startups during the pilot, and a clear idea of the challenge, is essential for the startups.

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