



Initiated by the European Institute
of Innovation and Technology (EIT)



Open Innovation Factory

Supporting the next generation of digital startups, from pilots to partnerships



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1. Introduction

28DIGITAL's Open Innovation Factory is a matching process designed to help digital startups connect with Europe's innovation ecosystem. It offers tailored growth pathways by linking startups to a wide range of opportunities, including access to EU calls and projects, co-creation with corporate partners, facilitated market access, and high-value innovation services. Through this process, startups can validate their solutions, gain early traction, and build long-term relationships across the ecosystem.

Expression of Interest applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed regularly throughout the year.

2. Open Innovation Factory

Startups are invited to submit their **Expression of Interest** at any time throughout the year. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis and evaluations are conducted regularly to ensure timely feedback and continuous engagement. Applicants should consult the [Open Innovation Factory website](#) for more information.

To support effective opportunity matching, each startup is encouraged to provide the following information:

- **Problem–solution fit:** A clear description of the business challenge being addressed, and how the startup's solution responds to it. The solution should be grounded in digital or DeepTech innovation, with the potential to create meaningful value or transformation.
- **Market potential:** Insights into the startup's target market, including signals of demand, growth potential, and scalability of the solution.
- **Startup team:** Background on the founding team, including relevant experience, commitment, and the team's ability to develop and deliver on the startup's goals.
- **Corporate relevance:** Evidence of interest from corporate customers or other relevant stakeholders. If prior discussions, validation steps, or co-creation activities have taken place, these are useful to share.
- **Strategic alignment:** A short reflection on how the startup's goals align with 28DIGITAL's mission — including support for deep tech innovation, European technological sovereignty, financial sustainability, and positive societal impact.
- **Intellectual property:** Confirmation that the startup holds the rights to the core technology or know-how behind its solution (either through formal IP or proprietary capabilities).

3. How to Participate

An Expression of Interest must be submitted electronically in English via the submission link provided on the **Open Innovation Factory webpage**.

All applications must include the mandatory information specified in the online form. If required information is missing or inadmissible, the startup will be notified. Where relevant, 28DIGITAL may invite the startup to complete missing details or suggest a future resubmission once additional elements are in place.

Startups are encouraged to contact 28DIGITAL at any time for guidance or clarification. Enquiries can be sent to **oif@28digital.eu**.

4. Expression of Interest

Startups from all geographies are welcome to submit an Expression of Interest. However, having a registered legal entity in an EU Member State or a country associated with Horizon Europe¹ may broaden access to EU-funded opportunities.

Startups may be connected to a variety of high-impact opportunities, including (but not limited to):

- Cascade funding schemes linked to EU projects
- Proof-of-Concept (POC) collaborations with corporate partners
- Targeted investment calls to support growth and market entry
- Tailored mentoring, training, and strategic support through 28DIGITAL's innovation services
- Direct access to 28DIGITAL funds

If no immediate match is identified, 28DIGITAL will provide **detailed feedback and recommendations** for future engagement.

For an overview of all available programs and opportunities, please visit: **28digital.eu/all-startup-opportunities**.

5. Matching

Once the startup submits its Expression of Interest via the link provided on the **Open Innovation Factory webpage**, 28DIGITAL will assess how it aligns with the support instruments available through

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

the Open Innovation Factory and the broader 28DIGITAL ecosystem. The most relevant opportunities will be matched based on three main dimensions: Excellence, Impact, and Quality and Efficiency of the Implementation. If any required information is missing or unclear, 28DIGITAL may request additional documentation before proceeding.

Excellence

1. Is the addressed problem clearly defined and commercially relevant?
2. How strong is the problem–solution fit and how well validated is the approach?
3. Is there active interest or engagement from corporate customers or similar stakeholders?
4. How does the startup position itself competitively? Are its assumptions sound?

Impact

5. Does the startup show high potential for scale and success? Are revenue projections ambitious yet credible?
6. Is there demonstrable economic, societal, or environmental impact for Europe?
7. Is the timing aligned with broader market, societal, or technological trends?
8. Does the startup align with 28DIGITAL’s ecosystem and strategic priorities?
9. Is the team gender-balanced and/or based in a RIS country?

Quality and Efficiency of the implementation

10. Is the startup sufficiently capitalised to execute its plan?
11. Is there a credible exit path (e.g., 5x return within 7 years)?
12. Is the founding team equipped and experienced to bring the solution to market?

Open Innovation Factory is not one-size-fits-all. Instead, 28DIGITAL applies a tailored matching process to identify the most relevant opportunities for each startup.

If a promising match is identified, the startup will be invited to engage further — for example, to refine their application, explore a corporate co-creation opportunity, or begin preparation for a funding process.

If no immediate match is found, 28DIGITAL will provide constructive feedback and suggest next steps or future opportunities.

Once a startup is matched with a specific program or support instrument, it must follow the rules, procedures, and timelines associated with that opportunity. Each opportunity comes with its own set of operational requirements. The startup will be clearly informed of these and guided to the appropriate resources and contacts for the next steps.

In selected high-potential cases, 28DIGITAL may invite the startup into a **dedicated investment evaluation process**. This only applies when:

- The startup demonstrates strong strategic alignment with 28DIGITAL’s mission and priorities
- There is a clear and validated investment use case, such as a corporate co-creation opportunity

- The case meets internal investment criteria and available capacity

Please note that access to this investment track is **not automatic** and remains at the sole discretion of 28DIGITAL, based on strategic fit and resource availability. If this opportunity becomes relevant, the startup will receive further guidance on how to proceed.

6. Communication, Dissemination and Visibility

Unless otherwise agreed with 28DIGITAL, all selected startups are expected to actively promote the support received and the outcomes achieved through their participation in the Open Innovation Factory.

Startups should share this information with relevant audiences — including media, partners, stakeholders, and the general public — through targeted communication and dissemination activities.

In the event of planned communication with significant media exposure or public visibility, the startup must **inform 28DIGITAL in advance** to ensure proper coordination and brand alignment.

7. Gender Equality

28DIGITAL is committed to promoting gender equality and diversity across all its activities, as outlined in its Gender Mainstreaming Policy. Applicants are encouraged to integrate gender considerations into the design of their proposed activities, ensuring inclusivity and equal opportunities. Additionally, during the contract performance, applicants should share their measures and strategies that promote gender equality, contributing to a more equitable digital innovation ecosystem.