

STADIEM

STARTUP DRIVEN INNOVATION IN EUROPEAN MEDIA

D2.4 A COMPREHENSIVE STARTUP INCUBATION FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT FOR THE EUROPEAN MEDIA SECTOR STARTUP INDUSTRY V2

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Abstract	This whitepaper gives a bird's eye view and looking back to STADIEM's framework, reflecting an alignment with both startup agility and the strategic goals of corporate and public financiers. The operational model was tailored to the unique context of each cohort, incorporating a startup supplier model foundation and executed through a diminishing funnel-based approach. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, STADIEM delivered exceptional outcomes, demonstrating a resilient and effective framework for startup-corporate collaboration.
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DEM: Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs

DEC: Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos, etc.

OTHER: Software, technical diagram, etc



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The STADIEM project represented a collaborative effort aimed at fostering innovation within the European content and media sector amidst escalating competition with global tech giants. Initiated by four major European ecosystem players, and a total of seven consortium partners, the project sought to bridge the gap between promising startups and established corporations, leveraging a custom-built five-stage model and a startup supplier program framework over a 36-month program period. The overall goal was to deliver a cutting-edge startup to corporate B2B program catalyzing the go-to-market of next-generation media solutions, but also long-term B2B deals between participating corporations and startups.

This whitepaper gives a bird's eye view and looks back to STADIEM's framework, reflecting an alignment with both startup agility and the strategic goals of corporate and public financiers. The operational model was tailored to the unique context of each cohort, incorporating a startup supplier model foundation and executed through a diminishing funnel-based approach. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, STADIEM delivered exceptional outcomes, demonstrating a resilient and effective framework for startup-corporate collaboration.

The program's impact is evident in the successful progression of several startups, the seamless integration of corporate collaboration, and the efficient distribution of funding. Positive feedback from all involved parties underlined the success of the framework, with a particularly noteworthy achievement in the management of consortiums and strategic decision-making. The project's ability to navigate a complex business environment and the volatile conditions of the pandemic showcase its robustness and adaptability for further financing either by the EU, the VCs or private entities.

STADIEM's journey, from inception through execution, serves as a viable pilot case for future European innovation initiatives. The project not only achieved its objectives but also provided valuable insights and lessons learned, which are shared with the broader startup and innovation community. This whitepaper documents these learnings, offering a blueprint for replicating success in similar programs and reinforcing Europe's competitive stance in the global market.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In a business and innovation environment in the European content and media sector where competition between the continent incumbents and the global tech players is throttling at maximum and will be seeing new heights with the EU's gatekeeper's act, the customer's choices are not only driven by content excellence but also market best tech and interfaces operational decisions call for data and AI-driven insights. Yet, internal R&D, product development, and innovation department budgets are shrinking; European corporations increasingly look for cutting-edge solutions from startups that can deliver the next breakthrough - either in product innovation, customer attraction, or revenue growth.

Similarly, in a post-COVID environment and economic cooldown where VC funding has rapidly tanked, European media innovators and scaleups, especially in the pre-seed and seed stages, are increasingly searching for business-to-business (B2B) growth opportunities to scale their solutions via corporate clients or partnerships and achieve go-to-market outside their home territory.

Yet how to do that effectively remains an elusive question. While the market is saturated with acceleration and incubation programs, only a few of those focus on improving corporate partnerships, especially in the early stage of the startup's life cycle. The same applies to the VC, who often expects growth metrics but, with a few exceptions in the marketplace, has resources and internal capacity to invest in upskilling. Corporates, and as various academic and industry deep dives demonstrate, have different, if not conflicting, interests in working with startups, seeking access to market innovation, or just providing exciting projects to collaborate for their teams, with lukewarm intent to seek and invest in tangible business partnerships. This often derives from radically different operational cycles, lack of identification of clear internal product holders or managers, and the inability of the startups to account for the corporation's foundational business requirements, whether in accountability for corporate business cycle, compliance with SLA (service level) or data & customer protection agreements and regulations, being in sync with the corporates overall strategic and tactical business goals, and last but not least - delivering actual and tangible business value via the partnership.

Those factors are exacerbated even more when looking to deliver a startup to B2B corporate growth in the European media and content sector. As the latest outlook of the European Commission rather bluntly puts out, the market is highly fragmented and driven by SMEs, with only a few large-scale players accounting for the majority of revenue and user base. Language and cultural differences prevent building and deploying robustly scalable products across the EU. In contrast, competition for eyeballs and highly fluctuating revenues set barriers to investments in new products. The corporations themselves, frequently tied to public service mandates or dependent on public subsidies, are more concerned with staying afloat rather than investing in innovations, and innovation managers are concerned with deploying updates to their existing tech stack or product lineup rather than supporting in long term, high-risk partnerships with startups with no guarantees in place for success.

How to then successfully build, deploy, and deliver a Horizon Europe back, 36 months, high intensity to market program between European pre-seed and seed stage startups that would distribute €3.8 million to the market for B2B collaborations, launch new cutting solutions for European consumers and B2B customers and deliver value across the innovation averse value chain. What would be a practical framework that would ensure the collaboration between four innovation hubs and seven partners from different European regions and ecosystems with varying tactical goals and objectives? And how to ensure that at least eight pilots between high-performing startups and corporates would take place in a highly turbulent pandemic and post-pandemic environment with restricted travel, reduced financing, and overall freezing of the business environment.



Exactly those were the challenges that we set to tackle with STADIEM - a pan-European startup supplier program managed by a seven-partner consortium and run by four ecosystem power players - a public broadcaster (VRT, Belgium), a high-tech media cluster (MCB, in Norway), an early stage investment fund and accelerator (NMA, in Germany) and ecosystem design and venture studio (Storytek, in Estonia). In 36 months, we gained ~700 applications from Europe's pre-seed and seed startups operating in 8 verticals. We distributed €3.8 million to 40 startups and 72 European top-tier corporates, boosted 10+ long-term B2B business deals, and catalyzed four exits.

In this short whitepaper, we share our initial assumptions and outcomes in building, deploying, and assessing the program framework, highlight the key lessons we learned along the way, and give our recommendations whether you are a startup program builder, ecosystem designer, financier or a policymaker, who embarks on a challenge of building a high-performance startup to corporate program in Europe.

We will look into our initial assumptions and collaboration model, the challenges of alignment and value delivery, operational and program delivery efficiency, deal flow, financial management, evaluation, and mentor involvement, as well the dedicated tools and pipelines and highlight or key takeaways.

How did we gather the learnings?

The learnings we share in this whitepaper are based on an extensive range of data gained throughout the program's 36 months of operation. Some of those include:

1. analysis of internal workshops within the consortium and between partners
2. frequent updates on the regular meetings (bi-weekly/weekly)
3. investor probing (through a dedicated survey in cohort 1 and direct meetings in cohort 2)
4. expert and mentor feedback gathered specifically during cohort 2
5. mapping of startup performance and satisfaction KPIs throughout the cohort funnel
6. mapping of corporate satisfaction at the pivotal stages of the cohort's funnel
7. tracking the performance of our initial assumptions and framework deployment, and putting our lessons learned into action

During the last quarter of the program, we also ran a large-scale study across the consortium core partners to map our initial expectations, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for what we want to share with the larger ecosystem and innovation community,

Throughout this whitepaper, we are referencing findings from some of our publications, if public, available at at the project's website stadiem.eu.



2. IDENTIFYING INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS AND ALIGNING PARTNER AND FINANCIER STRATEGIC GOALS.

The creation of the STADIEM project began with the get-together of four European ecosystem power players, VRT, NMA, MCB, and Storytek, which all had a long history of working with startups, tech for the European media ecosystem, as well as several of them working and funding from European Commission.

Each of the partners, with some of the members (hereafter GP's or general partners) a history of a previous collaboration between each other, were driven mission of making a dent in the European (media) tech ecosystem, yet partner assumptions with this larger mission varied greatly from working with innovation projects, supporting mediatech startups, growing an investor and deal-flow pool, and validating methods, tools, and services for driving high growth startup performance, especially for M&A and exits.

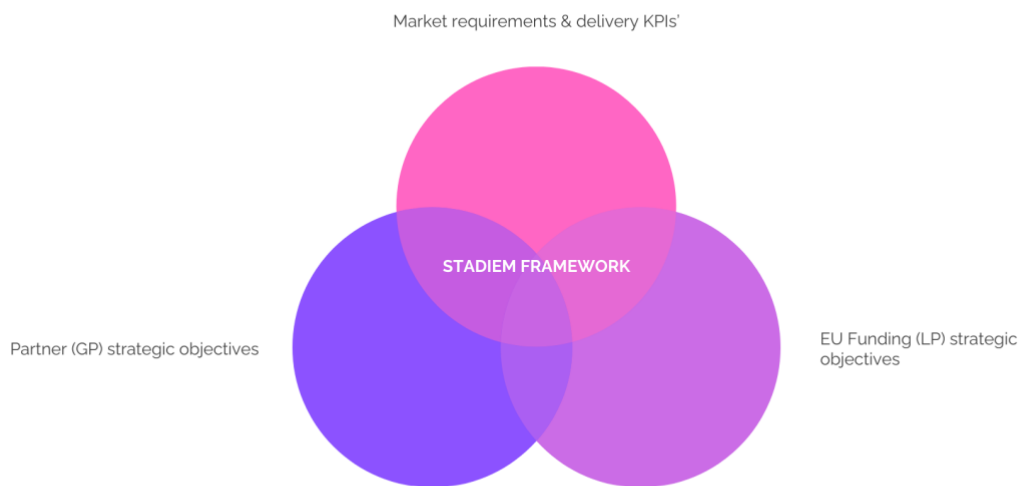


FIGURE 1: REQUIREMENTS FOR STADIEM FRAMEWORK



TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF STADIEM CORE PARTNERS

Name of the Partner	Territories	Operational Format	Key verticals	Focus areas
VRT	Belgium, mainland Europe	Corporation, Public Broadcaster	Public broadcasting related innovation	Corporate innovation, sandboxing, European R&D & innovation boosting program
Next Media Accelerator (NMA)	Germany, mainland Europe	Accelerator	Publishing related innovation	Corporate innovation, acceleration programs, R&D & Innovation boosting programs
Media City Bergen	Norway, Scandinavia	Cluster	Media innovation at large	Cluster focused innovation programs, European R&D the Innovation boosting programs
Storytek / Exit Academy	Estonia, worldwide	Innovation and Venture building studio	Mediatech innovation, exit and investments	Exit focused mature scaleup upskilling, boosting of exit capacity and investment capacity

On the other hand, we were faced with a range of missions from our key liquidity partner, the Horizon Europe program, which expectations were as follows:

- Concrete development towards a user-driven and user-centric media value chain triggered by an alliance of media producers, media users, technology, and cultural players.
- Validated new media services tested in real operational environments.
- Improved users' experiences and new solutions for access to media content
- An enhanced and enriched media ecosystem.

Those two sets of assumptions led us to the core challenge for the framework development and program deployment - How to design and update a high-growth startup to a corporate B2B program that would match the expectations of 4 innovation power players with different strategical needs and the requirements of European financier (such as the Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe framework).

2.1. THE FIVE-STEP PROCESS AND STARTUP / ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM DESIGN CANVAS.

To address the challenge of creating a high-growth startup to corporate B2B program that matched the expectations and strategic objectives of both GPs and the public LP (in the form of European financing), we utilized a custom-built five-stage model we piloted on cohort one of the project (from month 1 to 18th). We revisited this during our second cohort (months 19 to 36).

We then combined the model with a Startup / Entrepreneurship Program design canvas, developed by Storytek Innovation & Venture Studio, to help to devise and revisit the operational model and adjust it to both the ecosystem needs as well as the needs of the programs stakeholders throughout three cohorts.



STADIEM Five Step model

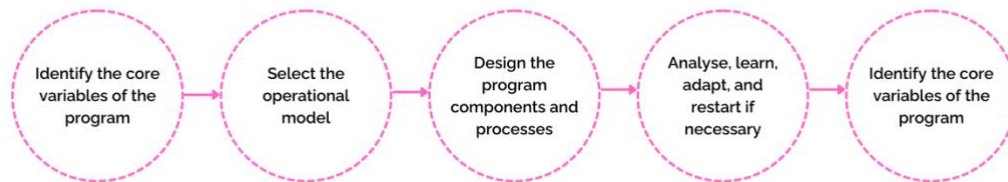


FIGURE 2: THE STADIEM 5-STEP MODEL

Finally, we compared the results of the framework deployment with a range of impact assessment and data gathering tools to keep frequent track of our performance and meet the expectations of our GPs and the key LP.

This framework was then developed as a two-cohort pre-seed to seed startup supplier program based on a startup supplier to foster collaboration between European startups and corporates with the focus on launching innovations to the market, testing new media services, and creating an overall changed ecosystem.

2.2 DECIDING AN OPERATIONAL MODEL

Once our assumptions were matched with the expectations of our key LP, we went to select and design an operational model for the STADIEM program. This was an intense process where we went to research and benchmark existing theoretical approaches, benchmarked the opinions, and needs of investors, corporates, and the overall health of the ecosystem, and looked thoroughly into the ups and downsides of different available operational models.

Some of the considerations that we needed to consider were:

- Need to design an operational model that would “work” for four different GPs and their organizational and strategic needs
- Take into account and implement unique tools and competencies of different GPs
- Devise a joint program that would deliver the core KPIs of the startup to corporate focus but leave ample room for independent operations of the LPs
- Provide tangible value to the startups and corporates while ensuring the “money best spent” principle
- Secure the financing from the potential market and startup-driven risk and failures



- Be operational in a COVID and post-pandemic environment.

After months of thorough research and market validation, we set to implement for the program a 4-stage startup supplier program model. In a nutshell, the startup supplier model accounts for “outside-in programs that enable firms to get access to innovations that increase the competitiveness of products or productivity of processes by engaging with startups based upon supplier relationships... [with] a clear focus on selecting, integrating, and developing promising startups as suppliers by facilitating direct collaboration with their internal departments, business units, or divisions.

Preferring Startup Supplier model over an Accelerator model.

- Market congestion: European and global market is entire of acceleration programs competing for deal flow
- Clear selected verticals: our research demonstrated that corporates need solutions in clearly defined verticals over a generic SaaS accelerator
- Focus on pilots: pilots are the best minimum viable method to deliver business value both for startups and corporates
- Barriers to taking equity as a business model: since Horizon Europe and European R&D funding generally prohibits taking equity in the money allocated for 3rd parties and beneficiaries, we needed to opt for a model that delivers business value outside the classical VC accelerator model where investment compensation is driven by equity. Instead, we saw the expanded corporate networks, utilizable business insights, and extended deal flow as primary “incomes” for the GPs involved. This, of course, in practice, resulted in diverging outcomes, including financial hardships for some of the GPs who were registered as private rather than nonprofit or public entities..
- Need to deliver business value: our LP requirements, as well as previous experience with corporates, pointed out that instead of generic innovation collaboration, the focus needs to be on delivering solid business solutions through a B2B co-creation-based funnel that would ultimately result in business deals (over new novel innovations).
- Market-leading data showed clearly that “accelerators “ were out and “startup supplier” programs were in, and we decided to follow the best practices in the ecosystem.



STADIEM's Core Processes

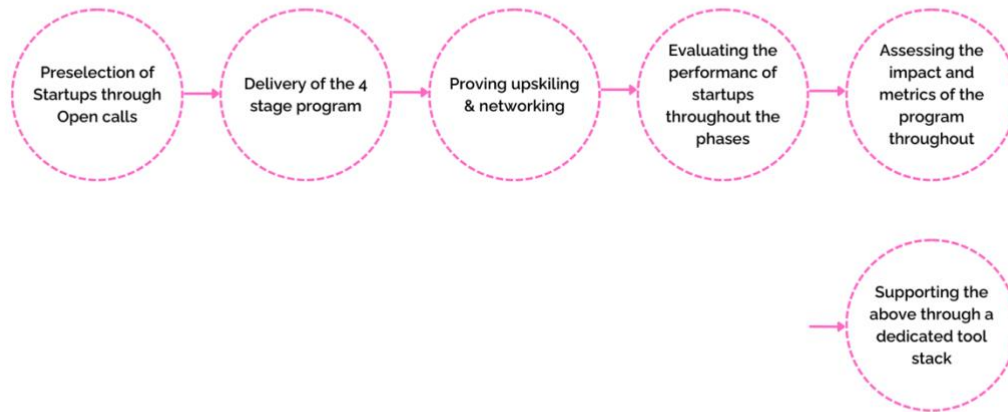


FIGURE 3: STADIEM CORE PROCESSES

Naturally, opting for a startup supplier model came with pains. The four GPs debated intensely on the operational model for almost six months during the first year of the program revised it during the second year primarily based on ecosystem feedback and implemented minor corrections (including more focus on B2B skills for startups) during the third through weekly and biweekly meetings of the GPs, dedicated sessions, and deep dives after pivotal phases of the program. Some of our deeper insights into the process are available in our annual framework reports available here.



STADIEM as Startup Supplier program

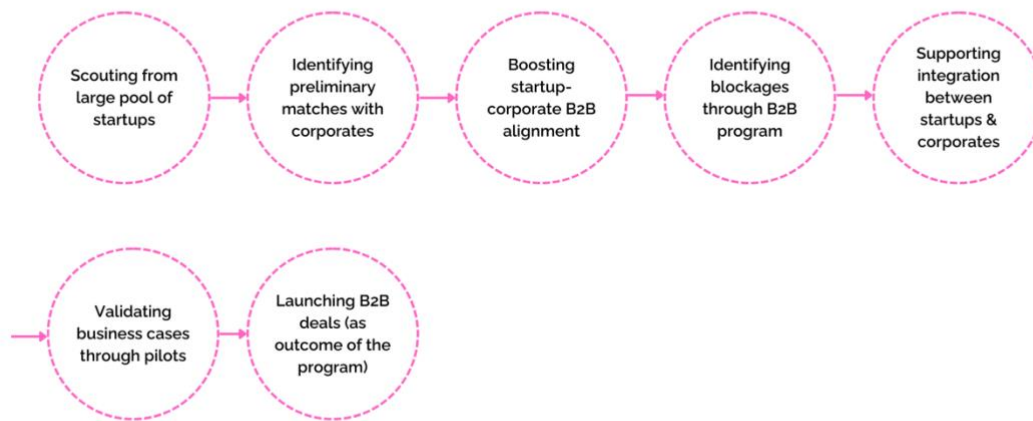


FIGURE 4: STADIEM AS A STARTUP SUPPLIER PROGRAM

2.3 LAUNCHING AND OPERATING THE FINAL PROGRAM DESIGN

- Taking the startup supplier model as the foundation, we set to build, launch, and operate a diminishing funnel-based operational model deployed on the following principles:
 - We would run two startup supplier model-based cohorts.
 - The program is based on a diminishing funnel where startups are assessed at each stage and eliminated based on performance ranking
 - at each phase. Startups will be cashed against deliverables established by them at the beginning of each phase and assessed at the end of the phase
 - the startup's performance is evaluated by an investment committee consisting of experts and representatives of the oversight board and GPs
 - since the Pilot between a corporate and startup is dependent on the business relationship between the two entities, the final assessment from integrate to Pilot is done by independent evaluators and based on a self-assessment by startup and corporate on their collaboration potential. The experts provide a ranking that is combined with the ranking of the investment committee.
 - The funnel approach will be deployed twice through cohort with an overlap due to the limitations on the funding used by the LP.
 - The program is managed in a shared manner, with LPs taking turns running respective phases
 - Performance is monitored frequently through the toolkit and MVP (minimum viable) impact assessment



- Oversight and adjustments are provided by weekly and biweekly GP meetings and overall meetings with the consortium.

The following describes STADIEM's final program design in a nutshell.

STADIEM Program: Funnel Design

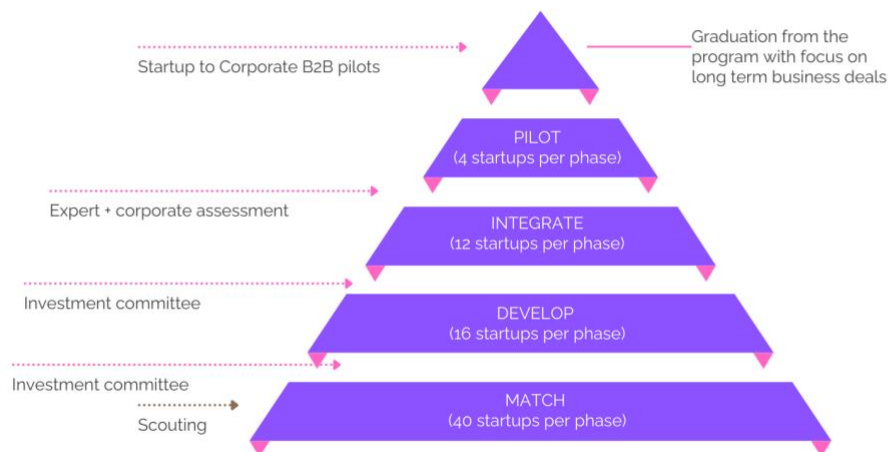


FIGURE 5: STADIEM PROGRAM IN A NUTSHELL

STADIEM is a B2B startup supplier program for catalyzing innovations between European startups and corporates. It selects 40 startups/& scaleup with innovative products and high-scaling and piloting potential whose solutions can be integrated/incorporated into the European corporate/media sector and beyond, thus developing new products and services that address current (media) challenges. As part of the action, experts and mentors will also provide startups with the expertise to complete their pilot goals and needs.

Startup eligibility criteria.

- Operational for at least one year with proven founding documents,
- Cash runway or self-funded for at least six months to a year to prove the Startup/Scaleup can finish the program, or a letter of comfort from their investor(s),
- B2B 80% (if B2C, then needs B2B partnerships),
- Team and time available to participate in the program – based on team members and time dedication,
- Proven initial product/market fit - at least one (Corporate) client or LOI or product/business development in the process,
- Piloting capable product - live or in late stages of (publicly) available beta,
- Has raised an investment or is self-financed (minimum: late-seed or Pre-Series A or very well-known acceleration/incubation/CVC program).
- Not demonstrating the issues of multiple participation.



Principles for funding for startups.

The STADIEM program was based on a 4-phase Match > Develop > Integrate > Pilot. Each phase comprised a set of activities that must be carried out by a selected startup that qualified for financial support. All the funds allocated to startups would be based on concrete results and a KPI assessment. KPIs will be set separately with each startup at the beginning of each phase.

Each startup will be asked to present a budget and KPI planning at the beginning of each phase. Cost and KPI reporting for the end of each phase will be requested to see if the goals are met. After the accomplishment of the KPIs, the teams will receive the corresponding payments.

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF STADIEM PROGRAM PHASES

Phase	Action	Duration	Startups	Funding per startup
Match	Start-Up/Scale-Ups identify Corporate partners and lead for developing a Pilot/and present an LOI or strategy to lock Pilot partner(s)	2 months	40	€7K
Develop	Start-Up/Scale-Ups ensure validated commitment from Corporate partners to carry out the Pilot within the timeframe and plan allocated.	6 months	16	€70K
Integrate	Start-Up/Scale-Ups begin(technical) integration and testing or pre-Pilot activities for public Pilots. This includes but is not limited to internal testing and evaluation of business processes and performance, technologies, and solutions that enable and drive forward the Start-Up/Scale-Up and Corporate collaboration.	2 months	12	€27.5K
Pilot	Start-Up/Scale-Ups will execute public Pilots with the Corporate in real-life environments. The Pilots are evaluated for generating business value and gathering feedback from customers and other involved parties.	4 months	4	€50K

2.4 STADIEM OUTCOMES

What did we accomplish by launching, deploying, and assessing the program in a COVID-19 and post-pandemic environment?

Overall, and in hindsight, STADIEM and its unique framework delivered an outlier success in a complex business environment whilst addressing a range of diverse needs of its GPs and the requirements of the LP.

In a nutshell, we championed success in the following:

- The four-stage B2B startup supplier model has market potential, indicating the viability of analogous programs. The program validated the need for a high-growth startup-to-



corporate supplier program in the European market by involving 72 corporate entities and 40 startups throughout its two cohorts.

- Focus on value delivery drives benefits for startups and corporates alike: the program catalyzed four exits and 10+ long-term B2B success.
- Applying a custom-tailored framework keeps the program on track. There were no significant failures or dropouts from the program, and a clear cadence was seen as a critical success factor on behalf of corporates. The program's flexibility in allowing GPs to utilize individual innovation methodologies and methods permitted tailored approaches.
- Transitioning to centralized communication platforms like Slack and structured data collection via Airtable improved operational efficiency.
- Significant engagement with stakeholders through online and offline channels demonstrated the program's reach, even during the pandemic.
- A well-tailored public-private model can make a significant impact on the European ecosystem. Combining public R&D financing as a market blocker eliminator can catalyze tangible impact in the ecosystem, significantly when VC funding is cooling. Collaboration with media scaleups fostered a culture of innovation, aiding in the digital transformation and building of a broad network.

Of course, success did not come without failures or lessons learned. In the next section, we will briefly present the key issues, lessons we learned, and recommendations for future program managers.



3. A DEEP DIVE INTO THE EFFICIENCY OF THE STADIEM FRAMEWORK: ISSUES, LESSONS LEARNED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

One of the core requirements of our LP and the program's funding was to share the key lessons learned with the startup and the European innovation community.

Throughout winter 2022 to summer 2023, the STADIEM GPs did weekly dives into the deployed framework to probe its efficiency and capacity not only to continue the program with fully private investment in the future (including a scenario of raising another fund) but also to give insights to other seeking to launch a similar program. The following is an overview of our key findings gathered through a large-scale deep dive study undertaken by all partners to assess various core elements of the program - overall efficiency, operations, financing, collaboration with startups & corporates, deal flow, overall consortium management, and tools. Those were analyzed with the program's framework development partner, Storytek Innovation and Venture Studio, and are presented in a three-fold format: encountered issues & challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations.

3.1 OVERALL EFFICIENCY

Issues and Challenges

- Diverse engagement levels across corporate partners, with some entities showing reluctance to collaborate during global challenges such as pandemics.
- Variability in the adoption of digital tools and processes, which affected the operational efficiency and communication within the program.
- Difficulties in aligning the goals and methods of various consortium partners due to differing focuses and expertise.
- Budget constraints within some participant organizations, which limited the ability to implement and scale innovative solutions.
- Rapidly evolving market conditions that necessitated continuous reassessment of strategies and approaches.

Lessons learned

- Effective collaboration hinges on the synchronization of expertise and active engagement from all partners.
- Adaptability to unexpected circumstances, such as global health crises, is critical for the continuity of innovation programs.
- Continuous assessment of market dynamics and flexible decision-making are key to staying competitive and relevant.
- The value of a diverse network and the exchange of knowledge within the ecosystem cannot be overstated.
- A unified vision and clear communication are essential in managing consortiums with varying objectives and capabilities.



Our Recommendations

- Establish robust communication frameworks and ensure goal alignment among stakeholders
- Design program structures with built-in flexibility to adapt to external challenges and internal process improvements.
- Embrace a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing to leverage collective expertise and drive innovation.
- Implement a clear and comprehensive evaluation mechanism to measure program impact and guide data-driven decision-making.
- Prioritize equitable engagement and resource allocation to support the participation of all partners and maximize program outcomes.

3.2 OPERATIONS

Issues and Challenges

- The program's workload was often underestimated, leading to significant challenges in terms of resource allocation and budget planning.
- Changes in organizational structures and staff roles over the program's tenure affected continuity and consistency in engagement.
- Managing the dynamic and varied expectations of partners requires substantial effort and adaptability.
- The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid pivot to digital communication strategies, altering the planned course of action for in-person events and networking opportunities.
- The process of integrating startups into existing R&D and product strategies was complicated by internal policy shifts and strategic realignments within the participating organizations.

3.3 FINANCING

Issues & Challenges

- Unanticipated Workloads: Some tasks, particularly during the Open Calls, demanded full attention and resources that were not initially planned for, leading to a reallocation of funds and efforts.
- Delays in Payment: Partners faced long waiting periods for payment, which strained financial stability, especially for smaller, private companies.
- Financing Distribution: The 70% funding cap for private for-profit organizations was deemed inequitable by some, posing budgetary constraints and cash flow challenges.
- Financial Stability: The EU's financing regime was not always attuned to the financial needs of the consortium partners, favoring larger entities with more significant financial buffers.



- **Cost-Benefit Scrutiny:** Increasingly, the cost versus benefit of innovations introduced by startups was closely evaluated, casting doubts on the cost-effectiveness of startup collaborations.

Lessons learned

- **Budgeting for Unforeseen Work:** The importance of analyzing tasks deeply and accounting for a higher percentage of unforeseen work became evident.
- **Timely Financial Planning:** Being more aware of timings and the EU's guidelines and practices for the financial stability of partners is crucial for budgeting.
- **Seeking Early Funding:** The necessity of seeking follow-up funding, both internally and externally, at an early stage cannot be overstated.
- **Financing Limitations:** Financial limitations highlighted the need for hiring experienced professionals and budgeting for advanced tools and expert collaborations.

Our Recommendations

- **Comprehensive Financial Analysis:** Future programs should involve a more thorough initial financial analysis and overhead planning in the early stage to anticipate and allocate resources for unexpected tasks.
- **Financial Stability Measures:** Adopt measures to mitigate the impact of delayed payments and maintain financial stability, especially for smaller entities. Those could involve external creditors, guarantees or cash flow facilitators.
- **Equitable Funding Structures:** Reassess funding caps and distribution to ensure fairness and adequacy for all organizational types within the consortium.
- **Proactive Funding Strategies:** Develop proactive strategies for securing follow-up funding to maintain the momentum of innovation implementation.
- **Cost-Effectiveness Focus:** Enhance the focus on cost-effectiveness in collaborations with startups to ensure a higher rate of successful transitions into the organization.

3.4 WORKING WITH STARTUPS

Successes and Positive Outcomes

- The program attracted promising startups and mature scaleups, some of which were successful in finding corporate partners.
- Majority of startups progressed to the development stage and successfully completed the program.
- Several startups secured substantial contracts, indicating successful commercial outcomes.
- The program managed uncertainties such as exits and pivots proficiently, maintaining flexibility and accountability.
- Engagement with top-tier experts contributed significantly to the startups' success and program outcomes.

Issues and Challenges



- Startups generally did not meet the quality expectations, with many in early development stages.
- Founders often lacked business acumen and resisted feedback, impeding their progress.
- There was a deficiency in founders' skills in formulating legitimate business cases with corporates.
- Communication and expectation management between startups and corporates were sometimes unclear.
- Reporting standard KPIs and metrics was a challenge for most startups involved.

Lessons Learned

- Engagement with startups provides valuable insights into both their challenges and those of the corporates they work with.
- Startups and scaleups require different support mechanisms based on their maturity level.
- Flexibility and adaptability are crucial for startups to navigate pivots and market shifts successfully.
- Evaluating startups at regular intervals promotes better resource allocation and accountability.
- Expert consultation is vital for startup success, particularly in areas of scaling and refining business models.

Our Recommendations

- Enhance founder education on business value creation and market-centric growth strategies.
- Improve founder receptiveness to feedback through structured mentorship and coaching programs.
- Establish clearer communication protocols and expectations between startups and corporate partners.
- Develop more robust KPI and metric reporting frameworks for startups to follow.
- Prioritize specialized upskilling for startups from the program's onset to bolster their development.

3.5 WORKING WITH CORPORATES

Successes and Positive Outcomes

- Collaboration with corporates was straightforward and received universally positive feedback.
- Startups played a significant role in attracting and impressing corporate entities.
- Hubs noted that when needed, corporates were approachable and cooperative.
- Preemptive measures by Hubs, such as providing advance notice, helped engage corporate teams effectively.
- The overall impression of corporates was positive, indicating a successful interaction between startups and corporate entities.



Issues and Challenges

- Difficulty in engaging high-level corporate stakeholders beyond innovation departments.
- Limited ongoing communication with corporates, often confined to evaluation periods.
- Suspected plagiarism in corporate responses in the first cohort, raising concerns about the value of engagements.
- Challenges aligning corporate schedules with program timelines, leading to coordination issues.
- Instances of corporate team changes, which affected the continuity and stability of cocreation cases.

Lessons Learned

- Effective collaboration requires engaging a broader range of stakeholders within corporate structures.
- Continuous dialogue and communication are essential for maintaining a healthy partnership between Hubs and corporates.
- Planning and clear expectations can mitigate the impact of corporate scheduling challenges.
- Ensuring the integrity of corporate engagements is crucial for the program's credibility.
- Identifying long-term corporate project leads can stabilize the co-creation process.

Our Recommendations

- Strive for strategic engagement with various levels of the corporate hierarchy, including decision-makers.
- Establish ongoing communication channels to facilitate continuous engagement throughout the program.
- Implement integrity measures to verify the authenticity of corporate engagements and responses.
- Align program structure and deadlines with corporate operational cycles to ensure coordination.
- Identify and secure long-term project leads within corporates to safeguard against internal changes.

3.6 MANAGING TARGETED FINANCING TO THE STARTUPS AND MONITORING KPIS AND METRICS IN AN EU-FINANCED PROGRAM

Successes and Positive Outcomes

- Funding distribution was efficient and prompt, with most deals being successfully executed within the €70,000 - €100,000 range.
- The structured timing of payments in three installments was clear and helped streamline the financial process.



- Improvements were made during the program, such as adopting standardized tools for better performance views.
- The framework toolkit built on Airtable improved efficiency compared to the previous Google Drive structure.
- All payments were executed within the contractual 30-day period, ensuring reliability.

Issues and Challenges

- Challenges included managing different invoices, currencies, and exceptional cases, which complicated the reporting process.
- The need for a potential revision of funding strategies to optimize capital allocation.
- Startups required more transparency regarding the payment dates, indicating a need for improved communication.
- Excessive and cumbersome reporting persisted, hindering operational efficiency.
- The financial reporting process relied on simple ICT and was not fully automated.

Lessons Learned

- There is a potential 'sweet spot' in funding allocations that could be targeted for cost-effective investments.
- Standardized financial tools and processes can significantly enhance the reporting and payment system.
- Transparency and communication about payment schedules are crucial for startups.
- Automation and modernization of financial reporting can reduce the time needed to process refunds and payments.
- The design of the payment process can influence the administrative burden and should be optimized for efficiency.

Our Recommendations

- Consider revising the funding allocation strategy to maximize the impact of investments.
- Enhance transparency and predictability of payment schedules for startups.
- Adopt standard accelerator management tools to streamline the reporting process.
- Implement a more automated and modern financial reporting system.
- Reevaluate the payment process design to minimize administrative efforts and maximize efficiency.



3.7 MANAGING THE CONSORTIUM OF GPs

Successes and Positive Outcomes

- Overall strategic decisions of GPs were informed by research and results, improving program phases.
- Regular GP meetings and bi-weekly discussions ensured close monitoring and adaptation.
- Clear operational patterns and objectives across phases facilitated participant adaptation.
- Startups were able to plan work in advance with pre-phase information sessions.

Issues and Challenges

- Distribution of funding saw 10% unutilized due to changes in beneficiary circumstances.
- Operational balance between administrative follow-up and startup-focused work was difficult.
- Timing of program cycles overlapped, leading to staff and resource strain.
- Summer scheduling for the pilot phase was suboptimal for public demos and business leads.
- Difficulty in engaging former startups for follow-up impacted program assessment.

Lessons Learned

- Travel restrictions and pre-established corporate connections reduced the need for match-phase budgeting.
- Templates and uniform reporting documents developed later can streamline future administrative processes.
- Digital tools like Airtable improved business intelligence gathering and reporting efficiency.
- Providing crucial information about upcoming phases in advance improves beneficiaries' planning.
- Curation strategy for non-selected beneficiaries can maintain relationships and gather valuable feedback.

Our Recommendations

- Reassess budgeting based on actual travel and corporate engagement needs.
- Use developed templates to refine administrative processes from the start of the program.
- Capitalize on digital tools for data curation and program impact assessment.
- Implement pre-phase informational sessions as standard practice for future programs.
- Develop a robust curation and engagement strategy for all beneficiaries, selected or not.



4. THE STADIEM TOOLKIT

The delivery and assessment framework toolkit consisted of a set of tools and platforms to help keep track of KPIs during the startup's involvement in the STADIEM program. The tools are intended to support the methods and frameworks for cross-border innovation and business development, as well as secure communication and securely storing data shared between the stakeholders and participants in the program.

Digital communication and collaboration tools were highly needed because of the COVID-19 situation, with its travel restrictions. The consortium aimed, therefore, to identify the requirements needed for a fully digital toolkit. Because participants in the program came from all corners of Europe, such a toolkit also had a positive environmental impact and time-saving effects.

The consortium identified the following solutions as needed:

- Database, storage, repository, and documentation
- Calendar and Timeline tool
- Communication tools
- Online learning and conferencing tools (video)
- Community management
- Progress tracking and evaluation toolkit

4.1 HOW TO SELECT AND IMPLEMENT THE TOOLS

The GP's decided to use the following criteria for the toolkit:

- Solutions already used by several of the consortium members
- Solutions that can meet more than just one need
- Costs, where reuse helps to keep costs down
- That the solutions are fairly well known and in use among startups
- That they can be easily implemented and further utilized
- That the solutions are already used in the STADIEM project by organizers or others.
- A No-Code / Low-Code approach, where we limit tailor-made solutions

We recommend it's more useful to utilize the participating organizers' experiences over many years rather than using the project as a test box for a completely new set of tools. There was never the intention to build an "Intranet" for STADIEM, but a collaborative platform for the consortium and the participating startups. The disadvantages of establishing a toolkit based on a completely new set of tools could risk the lack of synergies compared to what is used daily by the hubs; it could take away focus, lead to increased risk in implementation, and incur new costs.

In STADIEM, we did a poll among the participating consortium members/GP's where we asked what tools were in use. We wondered about even more solutions in the search for additional utilization and synergies, i.e., if there were any helpful incubator platforms, productivity & office tools, or CRM and newsletter tools in use. The poll gave us both a view of standard solutions and opportunities to search for ways to identify where costs could be saved or how to integrate workflows.

By selecting tools that both the organizers and, in most cases, the target group are familiar with, one very often has users with years of knowledge and superusers using them. In



implementing such a toolkit shared among several participants, our recommendation would be to hand out roles for the implementation and maintenance of the tools. Examples:

- Decide structures for how to organize data and files.
- How to set up automation and integration of tools.
- Roles and responsibilities for administration and access levels.
- Build templates that can be reused, together with documentation.
- How to do support on behalf of the different users.

The toolkit's main components for STADIEM are listed in Table 3:

TABLE 3: STADIEM TOOLKIT'S MAIN COMPONENTS

Solution	Purpose
Airtable	Online database, Calendar & Timeline tool, Community management, Progress tracking and evaluation toolkit
Slack	Communication tool and direct messaging
Google Workspace	Storage, repository, documentation
Zoom & Teams	Online learning, video meetings and conferencing tools

AIRTABLE was in use for several purposes, and one of the core tools was the centralized online database that was built around the service. The database has been set up to easily receive information (mainly through forms) and then distribute it to the right recipients. This part of the toolkit was implemented in a No-Code/Low-Code way, where we utilized integration and automation functionality found in Airtable and other tools. Setting up workflows in Airtable is relatively as easy as creating an online spreadsheet or similar. The advantage of getting it right into the database is that we create a better overview of where the information is and that it can easily be shared through predefined dashboards or interfaces and with verification and traceability.

SLACK was chosen to serve as both a communication tool and for community services in the STADIEM program. Utilizing the instant messaging solution proved to be a more efficient and organized method for sharing information and facilitating dialogue compared to email. Slack's dialogue support is beneficial for both group discussions through Channels as well as one-on-one conversations. Integration with other tools, such as Airtable, was advantageous for automated message publishing. (Screenshot of Slack below, showing different "Channels")

PRODUCTIVITY AND VIDEO TOOLS. As the members of the consortium subscribe to different productivity suites (i.e., Microsoft, Google, Adobe, etc.), we found it most sustainable and efficient to use the existing licensees within the consortium. The same applied to video call tools like Teams or Zoom. An important part of the toolkit was the cloud storage, which has text editing, keynote, etc., integrated. We agreed to use VRTs Google Workspace, which is the program's main storage, consisting of more than 3000 files.

4.2 LESSONS LEARNED, IMPROVEMENTS MADE

The baseline methodology of STADIEM builds upon Lean methods, where we Build, Measure, Learn, Implement - and repeat the process. As a part of the program, there were anticipated improvements in the toolkit from the first call of startups to the second open call. In a review, some of the following needs for improvements were identified:



- Communication channels between HUBs and startups need to be improved.
- Information that could have been written directly into the database and could also have been retrieved more easily goes through too many steps or ends up as stand-alone, unlinked documents.
- The tools that have been selected, how they are used, and whether adjustments should be made have been raised.

The main improvement we made was the streamlining of information. Where too much of the info had been shared via emails, we switched the information flow to the use of Slack and Airtable. By utilizing the interface, forms, calendar, and automation modules in Airtable, together with direct messaging in Slack, we managed to serve information in both a push and pull mode, more easily helping both consortium members and the startups.

The use of forms to gather data from startups gave us better opportunities to analyze data as the data was now more accessible in a database.

A crucial learning highlights a costly oversight in the allocation of admin and creator roles in Airtable. Contrary to the initial recommendation of limiting these roles to one or two individuals, numerous team members were granted these privileges, resulting in increased subscription costs and reduced accountability. Too many users might also heighten security risks, where data could get lost by a mistake. Our recommendation is a thorough role review from the beginning, user training, cost monitoring, and regular audits.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPTIMIZING A TOOLKIT IN A B2B PILOTING PROGRAM

Leveraging digital tools is crucial for ensuring efficiency and productivity for a program like STADIEM. However, it's equally important to use these tools thoughtfully and strategically to achieve optimal results. In conclusion, the effective use of digital tools in project management requires careful planning and strategic implementation. By streamlining workflows, defining clear goals, and building a strong framework, project managers can harness the power of technology to enhance collaboration, productivity, and project outcomes. We highly recommend setting up a budget for implementing tools and also including this in the budgeting if applying for grants. Here are three key recommendations for managers when choosing and using digital tools:

Streamline Workflows and Information Flows

One of the first steps in successfully using digital tools is to establish clear workflows and information flows tailored to your project's specific needs. We've learned Direct Messaging (DMs) can often be more effective than traditional emails, enabling real-time communication and quicker problem-solving. Additionally, consider utilizing different communication channels for various subjects and user groups. This helps ensure that the right information reaches the right people promptly.

To enhance collaboration and minimize misunderstandings, encourage one-to-one messaging when appropriate. Moreover, create "safe zones" for sensitive or confidential discussions, ensuring that team members are aware of the appropriate levels of disclosure when using different communication tools.



Define Clear Goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Before implementing any digital tool, establish clear project goals and KPIs. Having well-defined objectives ensures that a consortium like STADIEMs is working toward a common purpose and helps measure progress effectively.

Flexibility is key, as one-size-fits-all approaches won't work. Tailor your tool selection to align with the specific needs and goals of your project, and have a sustainable, time-saving, and cost-efficient mindset.

Focus on gathering valuable data rather than making everything into a competition. Aim for concise answers and clarity in reporting, as excessive data can lead to information overload. When using digital tools, ensure that they support your methodology, making it easier to analyze and interpret the data to make informed decisions.

Build a Comprehensive Framework and Methodology

Project managers should invest time in building a clear framework and agreeing on a methodology before implementing digital tools. Without a solid foundation, tools may not function as intended. Consider involving "Tool Masters" in your team, individuals who are well-versed in the selected tools and can provide guidance and training.

Remember to remain agile and flexible in your approach. Be open to adjustments and improvements as you go along. A lean mindset can help you optimize processes and tool usage continually. By fostering a culture of adaptability and continuous improvement, your project team can maximize the benefits of digital tools while achieving project success.

The No-Code/Low-Code approach we had reduces the need for maintenance costs. Be aware that there are numerous plugins and services that help you do such implementations. A small fee might be involved, but it can both open up opportunities and reduce manual tasks significantly.



5. CONCLUSION

The goal of this whitepaper to outline the development process and usability of the tailor made framework for the STADIEM program which ran from October 2020 to September 2023. The program outcomes of 4 exits, and 10+ corporate deals, plus 3 dozen startup to corporate collaborations speak volumes of the framework's robustness. Overall, the project delivered a multitude of successes, from propelling startups through development stages to facilitating seamless corporate collaborations and managing targeted financing efficiently.

Lessons learned from STADIEM are wide ranging, highlighting the importance of a structured yet flexible approach to building startup to corporate B2B programs. The project's preference for a cutting edge startup supplier model over well know and relatively worn out accelerator model, its adaptability in the face of the pandemic, its commitment to sharing knowledge, and the ability to swiftly recalibrate its operational model are key takeaways for future initiatives. Moreover, STADIEM's transparent and effective communication, rigorous monitoring of KPIs, and the successful management of a diverse consortium set a benchmark for similar future programs.

The STADIEM initiative and the framework has not only achieved its set goals but has also paved the way for sustainable growth and innovation within the European content and media sector. It has demonstrated the potential of strategic partnerships and the power of targeted financing in driving forward the European innovation agenda. The project serves as a blueprint for successful public-private partnerships, with its insights and methodologies offering valuable guidance for the wider startup and innovation ecosystems.

In conclusion, STADIEM framework and the project overall, stands as a great case study of how concerted efforts, backed by strategic insights and a commitment to shared success, can yield transformative outcomes. Its legacy will resonate through its contributions to the European business landscape, fostering a more vibrant, competitive, and innovation-driven future.

