

Call for Applications

Deep Tech European Venture Builder Competition 2027

The **De-TECH Venture Builder Competition 2027**, part of the **Deep Tech European Venture Builder (De-TECH)** project funded by the **EIT's Higher Education Initiative**, invites researchers, graduate students, and recent alumni (who graduated within the past five years) of **Universidad Politécnica de Madrid**, **Estonian Business School**, **Istanbul Technical University**, and **Leibniz University Hannover** to apply for a tailored 10-week training and mentoring programme.

Eligible applicants should be working on deep tech innovations developed at these universities, or the technologies should have originated from these institutions—even if their further development and commercialization have since transitioned to a spin-off or start-up.

Purpose and Attraction

This initiative is designed to accelerate the transition of deep tech innovations—advanced and emerging technological solutions to complex challenges—from research to market. It achieves this through expert-led training, personalized mentorship, and access to a dynamic innovation ecosystem.

Participants who successfully **complete the programme** will be eligible to compete for monetary awards of €15,000 each. These prizes will be distributed on a **competitive basis** across the four partner universities, meaning that multiple teams from the same university may receive funding if they rank among the top performers (e.g., if two or more of the best teams come from one partner university, each will be awarded €15,000).

Focus on Deep Tech – Advanced and Emerging Technology Solutions to Complex Challenges

The call for applications to the De-TECH Venture Builder Competition seeks to identify and support **promising university-based deep tech innovations – advanced and emerging technology solutions to complex challenges – with strong potential for market transfer and spin-off creation or development**. It specifically targets **transformative innovations in high-impact areas of deep tech**—defined as research-driven solutions that harness advanced scientific and technological breakthroughs to address complex societal or industrial challenges.

Therefore, proposals must clearly demonstrate not only a strong alignment with the definition of deep tech outlined above, but also significant market potential or the capacity to generate meaningful social impact. Selected innovations should present credible potential for high impact and may span fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, health and biotechnology, advanced materials, space technologies, or other science- and data-driven domains.

As detailed in the next section, eligible applicants must demonstrate an affiliation with one of the partner institutions, as outlined below—either through employment (for researchers, faculty or administration), academic enrollment (for graduate students), or ownership and founding ties (for start-ups or spin-offs established by academic community or recent graduates). To ensure relevance

and maturity, the initiative focuses on technologies grounded in robust scientific research and positioned at Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4 or higher.

Target Group

To be eligible, applications must meet all of the following criteria:

- **Deep Tech Innovation – Advanced and Emerging Technology Solutions to Complex Challenges**
  Propose a breakthrough innovation in the field of deep tech, with the potential to generate significant **market** or **social impact**.
- **Technology Readiness**
  The proposed innovation must be based on a technology that has reached at least **Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 4**, indicating that it has been validated in academic setting.
- **Institutional Affiliation**
  Be affiliated with one of the **De-TECH consortium universities—Universidad Politécnica de Madrid**, **Estonian Business School**, **Istanbul Technical University**, or **Leibniz University Hannover**—in one of the following ways:
  - Employed as a **researcher / faculty member or administrator**
  - Enrolled as a **graduate student**
  - Founder of a **start-up or spin-off** established within the last five years, **where the founding team not only included, at the time of establishment, but still includes academic/administrative staff, graduate students, or alumni who graduated within the past five years.**
- **Country eligibility:** Applicants must be a registered legal entity [which can be a natural person or an organization] in a Member State of the European Union, and Third country associated with Horizon Europe or a Low and middle-income country listed in this list: list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

As detailed in the section titled 'Evaluation of Applications,' we strongly encourage applications from women, minorities, and other groups historically underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and entrepreneurship.

Training Programme

Selected participants will benefit from a well-structured 10-week training programme covering key aspects of (technology) commercialization. More specifically, the following training modules (subject to final confirmation) will be delivered online, one per week with an estimated duration of 2–3 hours each on Fridays starting at 14:00 CET:

Week 1 – Friday, 15 January 2027, 14:00 CET
Overview of the commercialization process, technology readiness levels (TRL) and commercial readiness
Trainer: Antonio Molina (UPM)

Week 2 – Friday, 22 January 2027, 14:00 CET
Technology valorization and principles of intellectual property (IP) protection
Trainer: Helena Valas (EBS)

Week 3 – Friday, 29 January 2027, 14:00 CET
Opportunity assessment, market sizing, and competitive landscape
Trainer: Catherine Delevoye (Technoport)

Week 4 – Friday, 5 February 2027, 14:00 CET
Introduction to service providers and their role in business development; Proof of Concept (POC) process; securing a commercial pilot project; establishing and maintaining corporate contacts and partnerships
Trainer: Olivier Zéphir (Technoport)

Week 5 – Friday, 12 February 2027, 14:00 CET
Licensing, business model canvas, pricing and marketing strategy
Trainer: Henning Lucas (LUH)

Week 6 – Friday, 19 February 2027, 14:00 CET
Customer discovery and validation, agile development, and MVP creation
Trainer: Henning Lucas (LUH)

Week 7 – Friday, 26 February 2027, 14:00 CET
Investor relations and financial strategies for deep-tech start-ups and spin-offs, including public funding opportunities
Trainers: Juan Sáenz-Diez and Egert Valmra (EBS)

Week 8 – Friday, 5 March 2027, 14:00 CET
Deck structure, interacting with the business ecosystem, and pitching techniques
Trainer: Gleb Maltsev (EBS)

Week 9 – Friday, 12 March 2027, 14:00 CET
Startup journey and lessons learned from successful entrepreneurs
Trainer: TBD (LUH/UPM)

Week 10 – Friday, 19 March 2027, 14:00 CET
Final preparations for the Demo Day
Trainer: Gleb Maltsev (EBS)

Please note that this is a preliminary programme and minor changes may still be possible. Furthermore, please note that submitting an application to the De-TECH Venture Builder Competition does not guarantee automatic admission to the programme. A maximum of **12–15 qualifying teams / applications** (see the "Target Group" section above) will be selected on a **competitive basis**, based on the quality of the submitted application materials.

Selected teams will be invited to participate in a 10-week training and mentoring programme. Completion of this programme (see also the section "Participation Requirements") is a **prerequisite** for advancing to the final stage: the **in-person Demo Day in Madrid on 8–9 April 2027**, where finalists will pitch their innovations and compete for **€15,000 in prizes**.

This phased approach ensures that only the most promising and committed deep tech ventures progress to the final competition stage.

👁️ Mentoring Sessions

Up to three one-to-one mentoring sessions are planned:

- **Stage 1: Tech2Market Validation** (Topics of the weeks 1–5): Assessment of technology readiness level (TRL), commercial readiness, technology valorization and IP protection, technology and market fit, customer discovery techniques, value proposition refinement, business model development for licensing and spin-off ventures, and learning to know your customer;
- **Stage 2: Business Validation** (Topics of the weeks 6–7): Market engagement and validation activities, including work with corporates, investors, and service providers;
- **Stage 3: Promotion & Community** (Topic of the weeks 8-9): Business communication, survival strategies and preparation of the presentation for the final pitch at the DemoDay.

🗓️ Programme Timeline

- **Application Launch:** Nov. 2, 2026
- **Application Deadline:** Dec. 4, 2026
- **Notification of Applicants:** Dec. 15, 2026
- **Training Program Start:** Jan. 15, 2027
- **Training Program End**: March 19, 2027
- **DemoDay:** 8–9 April 2027 (in person in Madrid. Travel and accommodation for one team member per project will be fully covered by the programme).

What's There for You? = What Will You Gain? = Value Proposition

- **Launch Your Innovation:** Make a step in turning your research into real-world impact – 🚀
- **Gain Practical Skills:** Tech2Market and business validation – 🧠
- **Connect with Experts:** Mentors, investors, corporates, and peers – 🤝
- **Learn about Funding Options:** Public grants, VCs, angels, and hybrid finance – 💰
- **Accelerate Commercialization:** From lab to market, faster – 📈
- **Pitch with Confidence:** Refine your story and present to stakeholders – 🎤
- **Get Recognized:** Showcase your project at DemoDay and opportunity to compete for **15,000 euros** that will help the startup to develop the technology into a minimum viable product or support the roadmap for its entry into the market – 🏆

In this first round of the programme, **four prizes of €15,000 each** will be awarded on a **competitive basis** across the four partner universities.

Please note that the prize will be disbursed either to the **bank account of a registered start-up or spin-off company** (if the winning team is already established as a legal entity), or to the **individual bank account of the team leader, principal investigator (PI), or CEO** (if the team has not yet formed a legal entity). Disbursement is subject to applicable legal and institutional financial procedures, and winning teams will receive guidance on how to proceed.

The funds are intended to support the **further development of the winning technology** or to **cover costs related to its commercialisation**.

Evaluation Criteria of Applications

The selection of the participants in the training programme will be evaluated by the expert panel, made up of representatives from each of the four partner HEIs and five external experts. As stated above in the section "Target Group", eligible applicants should meet the following conditions:

- The proposed innovation must originate from one of the De-TECH consortium universities.
- It must fall within the scope of deep tech (e.g., AI, photonics, biotech, advanced materials).
- The technology should be at TRL 4 or higher (e.g., validated in lab).
- The applicant team should include at least one researcher, graduate student or recent alumni (who graduated no more than five years ago) affiliated with a participating institution.
- Team composition, capacity and commitment (5 extra points for the representatives of traditionally underrepresented groups in science, technology, engineering, and entrepreneurship).
- Applicants must be a registered legal entity [which can be a natural person or an organization] in a Member State of the European Union, and Third country associated with Horizon Europe or a Low and middle-income country listed in this list: list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf

Since the programme can accommodate up to **12–15 teams in its initial phase**, the expert panel mentioned above will, in addition to verifying the eligibility criteria, evaluate all applications using the indicators outlined in the "Reward Criteria" section below.

⚠ Participation Requirements

Selected participants will be expected to:

- Participate actively in all online trainings (2-3 hours per week over 10-week programme) and mentoring sessions (at least three in total)
- Submit progress reports and attend regular follow-up meetings.
- Take part in the final pitch event on the DemoDay in Madrid on April 8-9, 2027 (travel and accommodation for one team member per project will be fully covered by the programme).
- Explore follow-up pathways toward spin-off creation or technology licensing.

Reward Criteria

The De-Tech External Advisory Committee will be invited to evaluate the presentations at the final pitch event on DemoDay, taking into account the progress made as a result of participation in the programme. Final applications will be assessed using a weighted scoring system, based on criteria similar to those used during the initial application selection. That is, the evaluation criteria—designed to reward balanced and realistic proposals, not just highly disruptive ones—include the following elements:

- **Innovativeness of the technology** (novelty, scientific excellence) – 20 points;
- **Market relevance / social impact potential and scalability** – 25 points;
- **Use case of the technology / Problem-Solution Fit** – 15 points;
- **Maturity and feasibility for commercialization** (realistic development plan, IP status) – 25 points;
- **Team composition, capacity and commitment** (incl. team members, relevant experience and expertise, their complementary and availability) – 15 points.

How to Apply

Applications [available here] should be submitted with supporting documentation over email by Dec. 4, 2026 to: de-tech@ebs.ee

Redress process:

Applicants wishing to contest the outcome of the selection process may do so. Appeals shall be addressed by email to de-tech@ebs.ee within a maximum of seven calendar days from the day of the official communication of the results. The appeal can be lodged upon the following grounds only:

- Process errors by Deep Tech European Venture Builder Competition 2027organizing team and/or
- Technical problems beyond the applicant's control and/or
- Obvious human/mechanical errors by Deep Tech European Venture Builder Competition 2027 organizing team
- Factual errors included in the Evaluation Report (SER) provided to applicants.

An Appeal Pannel will be constituted consisting of all seven De-Tech partner organisations. The Panel assessing the appeal will have seven calendar days to provide a binding decision after the receipt of the documentation.

Intellectual Property & Confidentiality

Participants retain **full ownership of their intellectual property**. All applications and submitted materials will be treated with **strict confidentiality** and shared only with the evaluation and mentoring teams, all of whom are bound by **non-disclosure obligations**. No technical or proprietary information will be publicly disclosed without the applicant's explicit consent.

We are committed to supporting participants by facilitating **tailor-made solutions** between teams and mentors to address any IP-related concerns. At the same time, we strongly encourage applicants to consult their **Technology Transfer Office** and/or **legal advisors** to ensure appropriate intellectual property protection **prior to and throughout the programme**.

IPR and communication: *By applying to this Call, Applicants agree to respect the IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) Rules (Article 16) and comply with the Communication, dissemination and visibility rules, incl. branding guidelines and obligations set out in Article 17 of the Model Grant Agreement*

Organizing Team

The De-TECH Competition is organized by **the Deep Tech European Venture Builder Consortium,** coordinated by **Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM).** The consortium includes:

- Higher Education Institutions: Estonian Business School, Istanbul Technical University, and Leibniz University Hannover;
- Industry Partners: Technoport (Luxembourg) and Effectia (Spain);
- Public Sector: Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

EIT Higher Education Initiative

The Deep Tech European Venture Builder Competition 2027 is funded by the European Union through the EIT's Higher Education Initiative.