



Deliverable 3.2 | Recommendations for business acceleration providers



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Grant agreement number	101072248
Project acronym	Food-scalEU
Project name	Food-scalEU: Expanding the European digital agri-food acceleration ecosystem

Deliverable number	D3.2
Deliverable responsible	CEIN, S.L.
Work package	WP3
Editor	Olga Romero and Amaia Urtasun
Deliverable type	R — Document, report
Dissemination level	PU - Public

DOCUMENT VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Modification introduced	Modified by
Draft	15/07/2024	Inputs for introduction, lessons learnt and recommendations	All partners
Version 2	14/08/2024	Corrections and annex	Olga Romero
Final version	30/08/2024	Final inputs and format	Olga Romero, Amaia Urtasun

Abstract

The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations and insights for business acceleration providers, as well as for other key actors in acceleration ecosystems, based on the experiences of the territorial pilots' implementation during Food-scalEU project execution.



Table of content

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	Objectives of the Report	4
1.2	Project Overview	4
1.3	Methodology for gathering Lessons Learnt	6
1.4	Challenges and Good Practices.....	7
2	LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	12
2.1	Stakeholder Engagement and Ecosystem Collaboration.....	13
2.2	Policy Alignment and Regulatory Compliance.....	14
2.3	Effective Communication	15
2.4	Structuring and funding the acceleration programme.....	16
3	CONCLUSIONS	17

Annex I Summary RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS ACCELERATION PROVIDERS

List of figures

Figure1 Challenges

Figure 2 Recommendations for business acceleration providers



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the Report

The objective of this report is to document the insights gained from the Food-scalEU project and provide actionable recommendations to Acceleration Service Providers (ASP) to enhance the support and sustainability of acceleration services in the agri-food digital sector.

The report aims to serve as a comprehensive guide for acceleration services providers, providing strategic insights to introduce new or improved services into existing offerings, ensure that providers can adapt to the changing needs of startups and regional priorities, and apply best practices to drive sustainable development.

This document, which also identifies the best practices and challenges observed in the pilots conducted in different regions, is intended to complement the improved Business Acceleration Service Portfolios (BASP) (D3.1) and provide a framework of experience that will enable it to be more successful should any of the services be introduced in other regions.

1.2 Project Overview

Food-scalEU is a collaborative project involving 10 organisations from 11 regions in 5 countries, targeting both emerging and leading innovator regions¹. Participating organisations include: ASOCIACION CLUSTER ALIMENTARIO DE GALICIA (**CLUSAGA**) and CENTRO EUROPEO DE EMPRESAS E INNOVACION DE NAVARRA SL (**CEIN**) in Spain; KOZEP-DUNANTULI REGIONALIS INNOVACIOS UGYNOKSEG NONPROFIT KFT (**CTRIA**) in Hungary; FOOD-PROCESSING INITIATIVE (**FPI**) in Germany; **FOODVALLEY** and AGRIFOOD CAPITAL BV (**AFC**) in the Netherlands; POLE EUROPEEN INNOVATION ALIMENTATION BIEN-ETRE NATURALITE (**Innov'Alliance**), **VALORIAL**, TECHNOPOLE QUIMPER CORNOUAILLE (**TQC**), and **NORMANDIE INCUBATION** in France.

The vision of the Food-scalEU project is to strengthen European regional agri-food digital innovation ecosystems, particularly in emerging and moderate innovator regions, making them more connected, effective, impactful, resilient, and internationally recognised.

More specifically, the mission of Food-scalEU project is to:

- develop higher quality business acceleration services in agri-food digital innovation ecosystems of emerging and moderate innovator regions;
- expand the connections, knowledge, exchange, collaboration at regional, European and international level, between key people representing the different actors of the agri-food digital innovation ecosystems involved in the project;

¹ According to the regional innovation scoreboard published by the EC https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/regional-innovation-scoreboard_en



- balance the scaling-up of startups and SMEs and the creation of local high-value added jobs in the European regions involved in the project, by balancing the capacity of agri-food digital innovation and acceleration ecosystems in those regions.

Food-scalEUUp successfully **co-designed and piloted 5 new or improved business acceleration services**. By implementing these improved services (pilots) in emerging and moderate regions, each in collaboration with at least one leader/strong innovator region, the project tested service adaptation and joint implementation. In addition, a further pilot was organised and run by strong innovator regions run by strong innovator regions on building living lab connections.

Good practices and challenges have been extracted from these pilots, with the aim of providing support when some of the services that characterised the pilots are replicated in other European regions.

The main objectives of the pilots were:

- The aim of the **CLUSAGA** pilot was to **improve coaching and mentoring methods for start-ups and scaleups** within the Business Factory Food (BFFood) programme in Galicia. This included tailored coaching services, improved coordination with additional services and structured mentoring involving industry leaders. The pilot also aimed to provide pitch training and facilitate investor events to support fundraising efforts, ultimately promoting the growth and consolidation of innovative agri-food businesses in the region.
- The objective of the **CEIN AGROFOOD SCALEUP PILOT** was to support the growth and consolidation of agri-food startups and scale-ups in Navarra. The programme provided tailored support based on identified regional needs, such as building a connected ecosystem and improving access to finance. Key services included **support for negotiation and fundraising, and training for SMEs on diversification and investing in start-ups**. The programme encouraged collaboration between SMEs and start-ups, using sectoral partnerships to increase innovation and regional competitiveness.
- **CTRIA** aimed to test a novel sector-based and solution-focused **boutique coaching service** in Hungary, addressing the limitations of the previous non-personalised approach. This pilot provided tailored support to established SMEs in the food industry, focusing on specific bottlenecks through in-depth, personalised coaching sessions. The programme covered diverse topics such as business development, production management, international markets, innovation management, and resilience.
- The **Normandie Incubation / VALORIAL pilot** service aimed to address the challenge of change adaptation for industrial players and supported the industrialisation of local startups. Through the NormanDeepTech acceleration programme, the pilot **optimised partnerships between digital solution providers and agri-food sector users**. Key activities included networking opportunities, industrial site visits, and enhancing matchmaking, which fostered practical insights,



overcame scepticism, and provided market feedback. Valorial also boosted startup visibility at events, ensuring a comprehensive support system for deeptech startups.

- The pilot acceleration service conducted by **TQC / VALORIAL** in collaboration with Startup Palace, successfully facilitated effective matchmaking between innovative startups and large corporations within the health food sector through the 'Fork & Care' programme. The service emphasised **open innovation, expanding collaborative opportunities and enhancing partnerships at a European level**. Key aspects included sourcing startups, managing collaboration projects, and providing technical support, thus addressing regional needs and boosting the visibility and impact of innovative solutions.

Next to the pilots, a Food-Tech Living Lab Development Webinar Series was launched in response to the Food-scalEU project's discussions on the need for real-life testing environments for food-tech start-ups. Organized by AgriFood Capital, the series connected regional innovation actors across the EU, sharing lessons learned and promoting new technologies. It aimed to inform, inspire, and facilitate discussions among Food-scalEU partners, regional innovation actors, and accelerator service providers interested in Living Labs.

The webinars established a common foundation for discussion, fostering understanding and learning by addressing key topics such as infrastructure, stakeholder engagement, funding, and sustainability. Key takeaways emphasized stakeholder inclusion, trust, governance, and adapting Living Lab methodologies to local contexts. The series successfully built valuable partnerships within the Food-scalEU framework.

1.3 Methodology for gathering Lessons Learnt

The lessons learnt from the Food-scalEU project have been analysed using a structured approach encompassing four key aspects: **project definition and planning, process, impact, and proposals for improvement**. This structure was selected to ensure a holistic evaluation of the project, providing a comprehensive picture of the piloted services. By breaking down the analysis into these four main categories, the analysis was conducted within a clear and organised framework that facilitates a thorough understanding of the project's outcomes and areas for enhancement.

The project definition and planning section examines the foundational elements, alignment with previous work packages, policy alignment, regulatory environment, and funding mechanisms.

The process section focuses on the implementation aspects, including stakeholder engagement, communication, target audience, and execution details.

The impact section assesses the outcomes, acceptance by stakeholders, changes in behaviour patterns, and overall impact of the services.

Finally, **the proposals for improvement section** provides targeted recommendations based on the findings, suggesting enhancements for acceleration services, policy, regulatory aspects, and project collaboration.



This structured approach ensures that all critical components of the project are meticulously evaluated, offering a detailed and actionable roadmap for future improvements and effective acceleration service delivery.

For this analysis, a series of three online workshops were held with the participation of the different partners of the consortium. In these workshops, the different elements of the project were discussed, good practices, challenges and lessons learnt were analysed, and the resulting recommendations were considered.

In addition, information from the monthly monitoring meetings during the implementation of the pilot projects in the different regions has been used.

However, **the lessons learnt and recommendations have been written using a thematic approach**, focusing on specific areas such as stakeholder involvement, funding and financial support, collaboration and co-creation, policy alignment and engagement, service structuring and improvement, communication and collaboration, managing stakeholder expectations, and programme participation and retention.

This structure was selected to provide a detailed and actionable framework for understanding the project's outcomes. It offers a deeper dive into critical areas, ensuring comprehensive coverage and practical recommendations.

By categorising lessons into these specific themes, the report not only identifies precise challenges and successes but also provides clear, actionable recommendations tied directly to observed issues and best practices. This approach makes complex information more accessible, helping to effectively communicate findings to various stakeholders, including policy makers, acceleration service providers, and investors.

Overall, the thematic structure aligns well with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness of acceleration services, ensuring that the report remains focused on delivering valuable insights and guidance.

1.4 Challenges and Good Practices

A comprehensive evaluation of project definition, planning, implementation, and impact of regional pilots provided a clear understanding of both challenges and effective practices. This organised framework facilitated a thorough understanding of the project's outcomes and areas for improvement. The identified challenges and good practices during implementation of pilots offer insights into stakeholder engagement, communication strategies, target audience alignment, and execution details, highlighting obstacles and the strategies used to overcome them.



Figure 1. Challenges

✓ The project definition and planning section

The **project definition and planning section** examines foundational elements, alignment with previous project steps, policy alignment, the regulatory environment, and funding mechanisms.

Different regions faced various challenges during this stage, but also identified good practices that contributed to the project's success.

Securing long-term funding for accelerators is crucial for sustainability of programmes, as it ensures a steady stream of resources to support startups and scaleups throughout their developmental stages.

Regulatory compliance presented another significant challenge; adapting services to new laws and regulations, particularly those affecting the definition and support of startups and scaleups, often led to debates and subsequent changes in service bases and access requirements.

Policies are often vaguely defined, creating opportunities for shaping them but also posing challenges in aligning project goals with these objectives. Flexibility in adapting to emerging policies is necessary but not always easy to achieve. Navigating compliance with regulations related to data protection, consumer rights, intellectual property, and taxation is complex and resource-intensive, especially for startups and scaleups with limited resources.

Engaging territorial policy makers, particularly for short-term pilot projects, can be challenging due to their tight schedules and varying priorities. However, their direct involvement is crucial for aligning projects with territorial policies, often requiring significant effort and time.

A demand-driven approach is essential when defining any acceleration service. It is challenging to offer startups and scaleups the services that best suit their evolving needs. Companies, as living entities, experience changing needs throughout their development. Thus, providing services to a group of startups at similar but distinct stages of development is challenging for any acceleration service provider.



The work conducted of analysing regional acceleration ecosystems as well as the mapping and peer discussion among stakeholders was crucial in understanding the ecosystem's needs and the companies within it. Additionally, it provided a replicable, **structured methodology for identifying various actors in a given ecosystem and characterising the needs** of future programme beneficiaries.

The balance between what the startup thinks it needs and the insights of the acceleration service provider, based on their experience, is essential. **A co-creation methodology** was used **to incorporate different stakeholders and their points of view into the definition of the pilots.**

Stakeholders involved in the co-creation phase were acceleration service providers, investors, funding institutions, banks, clusters, agrifood companies and representatives from start-ups and scale-ups.

Organising several workshops during the planning phase, or involving different ecosystem actors anyhow, was key. This facilitated not only the involvement of these actors in the pilot development but also the inclusion of diverse perspectives on the services to be offered and their structure. This approach enhances the relevance and acceptance of the designed services.

Services were customised to meet the specific needs of companies at different development stages. By understanding the unique challenges and requirements of startups, scaleups, and SMEs, and incorporating feedback from other ecosystem stakeholders, the acceleration programmes provided targeted support, especially during critical moments such as financing rounds.

In the Food-scalEUp project, engaging various stakeholders was achieved through 360-degree focus groups, regional workshops or one-on-one meetings. Engaging policy makers, startups, and investors from the beginning ensured the alignment of project objectives with the ecosystem's needs and realities. This engagement provided valuable insights and generated a sense of belonging among participants. These groups facilitated comprehensive discussions, allowing for diverse perspectives to be shared, ensuring the design and implementation of pilot programmes addressed the needs of all involved parties. Additionally, aligning project objectives with relevant policy guidelines fostered a collaborative environment, enhancing the effectiveness of the provided acceleration services.

Good practices to be highlighted during the definition and planning of the pilots include a structured methodology, a demand-driven approach, and active stakeholder engagement.

The structured methodology provided a replicable framework for identifying and addressing the needs of the ecosystem and future programme beneficiaries.

The demand-driven approach ensured that the services offered were tailored to the evolving needs of startups, scaleups, and SMEs, with targeted support during crucial phases such as financing rounds.

Stakeholder engagement through workshops and co-creation methodologies ensured diverse perspectives were incorporated, enhancing the relevance, acceptance, and effectiveness of the designed services. This comprehensive strategy fostered a



collaborative environment, aligning project objectives with ecosystem realities and policy guidelines, ultimately contributing to the success of the acceleration programmes.

The **need for more complex stakeholder engagement and co-creation methodologies** explains the appearance of more specialised Living Labs or LL type organisations. These are increasingly seen as essential tools for enhancing regional innovation ecosystems. Numerous Food Tech Living Labs are emerging across Europe, each adapting to local contexts.

✓ The process

The process of implementing the pilots conducted focused on various aspects, including stakeholder engagement, communication, target audience, and execution details.

When organising international activities involving stakeholders beyond the consortium partners, one of the main challenges was **the use of different national languages**, which hindered effective communication and affected project engagement and implementation.

Clear definitions and frameworks were necessary to determine who could access the services, and effectively communicating the programme's benefits to potential beneficiaries was crucial.

Language differences among team members and stakeholders impeded effective communication and negatively affected recruitment for the new or improved accelerations services making it essential to overcome these barriers to ensure clear understanding and efficient project delivery. Developing clear and concise communication strategies to effectively reach and retain target audiences, such as SMEs, was also vital, as miscommunication could lead to misunderstandings and reduced participation. While opening the call for applications to participate in the acceleration services through social media or other "massive" communication channels helped attract new stakeholders, it was generally necessary to complement these actions with targeted efforts aimed at stakeholders considered of interest to the programme and already part of the ecosystem.

For instance, in one territorial pilot (CEIN Agrofood Scaleup pilot) the way the acceleration services were communicated to medium-sized companies had to be changed, noticing that they were more receptive when approaching them as mentors and emphasizing the support they were providing to entrepreneurs, rather than focusing on the benefits they themselves would gain from the training offered in the programme.

Finding suitable mentors presented another challenge, as identifying and recruiting mentors with expertise in both business and the specific fields of the startups required a deep understanding of the industry's nuances.

Retaining engaged mentors and participants throughout the Food-scalEU project lifecycle was also demanding, necessitating consistent communication, recognition of their contributions, and alignment of objectives to ensure their continued involvement.



Maintaining engagement of different stakeholders was also challenging, as initial enthusiasm often waned, especially if stakeholders felt their contributions were not valued or if there were language barriers and communication issues.

Ensuring the relevance of the acceleration programme to SMEs' needs to encourage participation and retention was crucial, as initial participation might be high, but maintaining engagement throughout the programme required ongoing effort and adaptation to feedback.

Motivating peers and other stakeholders to think collaboratively and participate actively in transnational activities during Food-scalEU project was essential but challenging and ensuring that all involved parties saw the value in collaboration was key to success.

Good practices identified during the implementation included the **active involvement of policy makers** in some regions, which ensured that the programmes operated within policy objectives and made it easier to secure future funding for their continuation.

Maintaining **close contact with territorial authorities** and keeping policy makers informed about the project's progress and outcomes was essential, as this ongoing engagement helped align the acceleration services with territorial policy interests and facilitated smoother programme implementation.

Early **identification and mitigation of language barriers** were crucial for effective communication and engagement among stakeholders, ensuring that all participants could communicate clearly and preventing misunderstandings.

Clear and concise communication strategies were essential to effectively reach and retain target audiences, such as SMEs, and by clearly conveying the programme's objectives, benefits, and requirements, the Food-scalEU project ensured higher participation and engagement from relevant stakeholders.

Exploring public-private partnership models was crucial in supporting innovative startups with significant growth potential, as these partnerships ensured long-term sustainability and addressed specific regional needs where corporate investment ecosystems were less robust.

Regular exchanges between consortium partners from different regions facilitated the sharing of best practices and insights, improving the design and implementation of pilots by incorporating diverse experiences and expertise.

In the Food-scalEU project, separating mentoring and coaching services and **building pilot methodologies on coaching and mentoring** were identified as effective strategies, providing more tailored and focused support to startups and scaleups, addressing their specific needs at different stages of development.

Services were regularly evaluated and refined based on feedback from stakeholders, ensuring that the acceleration programmes remained effective, relevant, and capable of addressing emerging challenges.



✓ The impact

Assessing the impact of the pilots within the timeframe of the Food-scalEUp project was a major challenge. While **operational performance indicators**, such as the number of companies benefited from the new or improved acceleration services, the number of workshops conducted and mentoring sessions held, are easy to measure and implement, understanding the deeper, long-term impact on startups and the wider ecosystem requires extensive monitoring. Capturing the **true impact on business growth, innovation capacity, and ecosystem resilience** necessitates longitudinal analysis and sustained engagement with the involved stakeholders. Thus, while initial metrics provide a snapshot of activity levels, ongoing evaluation is essential to fully appreciate and validate the enduring benefits and transformations brought about by the pilots.

2 LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of challenges and best practices from the Food-scalEUp project has culminated in a series of lessons learnt and recommendations for both acceleration service providers and policy makers.

The lessons learnt and recommendations have been written using a thematic approach, focusing on specific areas such as stakeholder engagement and ecosystem collaboration, policy alignment and regulatory compliance, effective communication, structuring and funding the programme.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND ECOSYSTEM COLLABORATION	POLICY ALIGNMENT AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively involve a broad range of stakeholders, including policy makers, from the beginning. Encourage and support the formation of public-private partnerships to create a robust support system for startups. Foster transparency and consistent communication with different actors in the ecosystem. Regular updates and inclusive decision-making processes. Identify and retain suitable mentors by recognizing their contributions and aligning their goals with the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage policy makers early in the design and implementation phases to align the programme with regional policy objectives. Identify potential regulatory challenges early and develop mitigation strategies. Maintain flexibility to adapt to emerging policies. Adapt the policy advice derived from Living Labs to the local context.
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	STRUCTURING AND FUNDING THE ACCELERATION PROGRAMME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop communication strategies that effectively reach and retain the target audience, including SMEs and other stakeholders. Address language barriers with clear definition and frameworks for service access Use both broad outreach (e.g., social media) and targeted efforts aimed at key stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a structured methodology for project definition and planning ensuring services are demand-driven. Foster an environment that promotes co-creation and collaboration among stakeholders. Implement a clear methodology for mentoring and coaching by systematically recruiting mentors. Implement long-term monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Refine and improve your services, ensuring they remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of startups and the wider ecosystem.

Figure 2. Recommendations for business acceleration providers

2.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Ecosystem Collaboration

Involving a wide range of stakeholders in acceleration programmes, such as policy makers, startups, scaleups, SMEs, and investors, from the beginning is crucial for ensuring that project objectives are well-aligned with the needs and realities of the ecosystem.

This inclusive approach facilitates the creation of relevant and effective acceleration services tailored to market demands. Employing diverse structured methodologies for co-creation, such as 360-degree focus groups and workshops, brings in varied perspectives. This not only provides valuable insights but also fosters a sense of ownership among participants, thereby increasing the relevance and acceptance of the services offered.

Building trust with different actors in the ecosystem through transparency and consistent communication is vital for establishing robust and supportive relationships.

Equally important is the **recognition and appreciation of mentors' contributions**, which helps maintain their engagement. Emphasising the societal impact of their involvement can further motivate them to support the programme.

However, identifying suitable mentors is a challenge, as it requires expertise in both business and the specific fields of the startups. Retaining engaged mentors and participants throughout the acceleration programme lifecycle demands continuous communication, recognition of their efforts, and alignment of goals to ensure ongoing involvement.



Sustaining engagement among different stakeholders can be challenging, as initial enthusiasm may diminish if contributions are undervalued or if there are language barriers and communication issues.

Ensuring that the acceleration programme remains relevant to SMEs' needs is key to encouraging ongoing participation and retention. While initial engagement might be high, maintaining it throughout the programme requires continuous effort and responsiveness to feedback. Encouraging collaborative thinking and active participation from peers and other stakeholders is essential but challenging. Ensuring that all parties recognise the value of collaboration is crucial for the programme's overall success.

Effective collaboration and co-creation are essential for the successful development and implementation of acceleration services. Public-private partnerships play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by innovative startups. By combining resources and expertise from both sectors, these partnerships create a sustainable support system that can more effectively nurture startups and scale-ups.

Involving stakeholders in the co-creation process ensures that the services developed are genuinely aligned with the ecosystem's needs. This collaborative approach leads to more innovative and effective solutions. By engaging stakeholders such as policy makers, startups, scaleups, SMEs, and investors from the outset, business projects can be designed to meet real market demands.

Recommendations for Acceleration Service Providers

- Actively involve a broad range of stakeholders, including policy makers, from the beginning to ensure the alignment of project objectives with the ecosystem's needs and realities.
- Encourage and support the formation of public-private partnerships to create a robust support system for startups, combining resources and expertise from both sectors.
- Foster transparency and consistent communication to build trust with different actors in the ecosystem.
- Regular updates and inclusive decision-making processes can enhance engagement and cooperation.
- Identify and retain suitable mentors by recognising their contributions and aligning their goals with the programme. Highlighting the societal impact of their involvement can motivate continued support.

2.2 Policy Alignment and Regulatory Compliance

Integrating territorial policy makers into the design and implementation of acceleration programmes is vital for aligning these initiatives with regional policy objectives and securing long-term support. Consistent communication with policy makers is essential to maintain their engagement and backing, which is crucial for the programme's success and sustainability.



Addressing potential regulatory challenges at an early stage is imperative. By identifying these challenges from the beginning, proactive mitigation strategies can be developed, reducing disruptions during implementation and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations. However, regulatory compliance itself is a significant hurdle. Adapting services to new laws and regulations, especially those affecting the definition and support of startups and scaleups, often necessitates debates and subsequent adjustments in service bases and access requirements.

Frequently, policies are vaguely defined, which can both present opportunities for shaping them and pose challenges in aligning project goals with these objectives. **Flexibility in adapting to emerging policies** is necessary but can be difficult to achieve. Navigating compliance with regulations related to data protection, consumer rights, intellectual property, and taxation is complex and resource-intensive, particularly for startups and scaleups with limited resources.

Engaging territorial policy makers, particularly for short-term pilot projects, is challenging due to their tight schedules and varying priorities. Nonetheless, their direct involvement is crucial for ensuring that projects align with regional policies. This engagement often requires significant effort and time. Maintaining close contact with regional authorities and keeping policy makers informed about the project's progress and outcomes was essential. This ongoing engagement helped align the acceleration services with regional policy interests and facilitated smoother programme implementation.

There's a distinction between Living Lab literature as academic analysis and the policy advice derived from it. It is important to adapt to the local context.

Recommendations for Acceleration Service Providers

- Engage policy makers early in the design and implementation phases to align the acceleration programme with regional policy objectives, securing long-term support and smoother implementation.
- Identify potential regulatory challenges early and develop mitigation strategies to ensure compliance and reduce disruptions.
- Maintain flexibility to adapt to emerging policies and ensure that services remain compliant with evolving laws and regulations related to data protection, consumer rights, intellectual property, and taxation.
- Adapt the policy advice derived from Living Labs to the local context.

2.3 Effective Communication

Effective communication strategies are essential for the smooth execution of projects, particularly in an international context where language barriers can impede engagement and delivery. Addressing language barriers early in the project is crucial to ensure clear communication and engagement among international stakeholders.



Developing clear and concise communication strategies is vital for reaching and retaining the target audience, including SMEs and other stakeholders. Miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings and reduced participation.

Effective communication involves not only broad outreach, such as through social media, but also targeted efforts aimed at stakeholders who are already part of the ecosystem and considered crucial to the programme.

Clear definitions and frameworks are necessary to determine who can access the services, and effectively communicating the programme's benefits to potential beneficiaries is essential. It also helps maintaining the interest and engagement of SMEs and other stakeholders, ensuring higher participation and ongoing programme engagement.

Recommendations for Acceleration Service Providers

- Develop communication strategies that effectively reach and retain the target audience, including SMEs and other stakeholders.
- Address language barriers early and ensure clear definitions and frameworks for service access.
- Utilise both broad outreach (e.g., social media) and targeted efforts aimed at key stakeholders within the ecosystem to maintain high participation and engagement.

2.4 Structuring and funding the acceleration programme

Effective **coordination of timing** and comprehensive **impact monitoring** are crucial components for the success of acceleration programmes. By aligning project schedules with regional timelines and ensuring continuous assessment of long-term impacts, acceleration service providers can better understand and enhance the contributions of their programmes to the innovation ecosystem.

Securing consistent long-term funding is crucial for the sustainability of accelerator programmes. These programmes also require access to reliable flow of financial resources to effectively assist startups and scaleups throughout their various developmental phases.

The involvement of policymakers is essential in securing and maintaining this funding. By providing financial support and establishing favourable policies, policymakers can help ensure that accelerator programmes have the necessary resources to operate efficiently and sustainably.

On the other hand, it's vital for startups to have **funding models that can adapt to the different stages of their development**. These flexible models help maintain financial stability and support growth from initial development through scaling.



Recommendations for Acceleration Service Providers

- Use a structured methodology for project definition and planning, focusing on ecosystem analysis and stakeholder engagement to ensure the services offered are demand-driven.
- Foster an environment that promotes co-creation and collaboration among local stakeholders, ensuring that acceleration services are tailored to meet real market demands.
- Implement a clear methodology for mentoring and coaching by systematically recruiting mentors based on expertise and programme alignment. Match mentors with companies considering both technical expertise and personality compatibility for effective relationships. Outline each process step with visual tools for clarity. Continuously assess and refine the methodology using participant feedback to address emerging needs.
- Beyond initial performance indicators, implement long-term monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to continuously assess the deeper impact of acceleration programmes on startups and on the innovation ecosystem and make necessary adjustments to policies and support structures.
- Use this data to refine and improve your services, ensuring they remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of startups and the wider ecosystem.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The Food-scalEU project demonstrated significant progress in improving the digital innovation ecosystem in the agri-food sector across several European regions, particularly in emerging and mid-innovation regions. By co-designing and piloting new or improved business acceleration services, the project successfully addressed key challenges such as ecosystem connectivity, access to finance and the need for tailored support for start-ups and SMEs. The involvement of different stakeholders, including policy makers, SMEs and investors, fostered collaboration and contributed to the successful implementation of the pilots. However, challenges such as language barriers, regulatory compliance and maintaining stakeholder engagement highlighted the need for continuous adaptation and improvement. The project highlighted the importance of structured methodologies, effective communication and flexible funding models to ensure the long-term sustainability of acceleration programmes. Overall, Food-scalEU provided valuable lessons and actionable recommendations that will guide future efforts to strengthen the digital agri-food innovation landscape across Europe.

Annex I Summary RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS ACCELERATION PROVIDERS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS ACCELERATION PROVIDERS

CHALLENGES



RECOMMENDATIONS

