LUBLIN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK

Post-incubation/post-acceleration program support, alumni programs, and community building

FOLLOW-UP NOTE

POLICY LEARNING PLATFORM MATCHMAKING SESSION

DATE: MONDAY 13 DEC 2021 – 11:00-12:30 CET & WEDNESDAY 15 DEC 2021 – 11.00-12.30 CET

BENEFICIARY: LUBLIN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK (LPNT)

TOPICS: post-incubation/post-acceleration program support, alumni programs, community building

PARTICIPANTS

Hosts

- Andrii Myrovych, member of pre-seed fund portfolio supervision and start-up scout, START EASY project partner coordinator, Lublin Science and Technology Park (LPNT)
- Milena Wróblewska, start-up scout for Connect Poland Prize, START EASY project, LPNT
- Karolina Woś, START EASY project, LPNT
- Jacek Jakubowski (attended 15.12), Lublin City Office

Peers and Experts

- Andraz Siler, BSC Kranj, Project Manager, Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, OSS project partner (Slovenia)
- Nives Justin, BSC Kranj, Project Manager, Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska and Manager of Kovačnica Coworking, OSS project partner (Slovenia)
- Matiss Neimanis, Buildit Latvia Accelerator and Pre-Seed and Seed Investment Fund manager (Latvia)
- Michael Tunney, Head of Enterprise and Economic Development, Donegal County Council / Local Enterprise Office Donegal, EIS project partner (Ireland)
- Lynn Oxborrow, Associate Professor, Nottingham Business School, SCALE UP project stakeholder (UK)

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

- Mart Veliste, Interreg Europe PLP Thematic Expert, SME Competitiveness
- Rene Tõnnisson, Interreg Europe PLP Thematic Expert, SME Competitiveness
- Elena Ferrario, Interreg Europe Thematic Manager

OBJECTIVES OF MEETING

Lublin Science and Technology Park (LPNT), a START EASY project Polish partner, sought to find best practices on entrepreneurship and start-up post-program support. So far, LPNT has built a significant track record of instruments supporting entrepreneurs and start-ups but lacks follow-up activities. LPNT aspires to build a full-cycle one-stop-shop for future and current entrepreneurs, especially innovative ventures in Lublin Region. While the START EASY project comprehensively covers relevant topic areas to create SME support instruments for quick and easy business start-up, LPNT wished to dive deep into specific topics: post-program support, alumni programs, community building, post-acceleration.

INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAY MESSAGES

- Peer-learning networks are great for building communities of enterprises. A peer-learning group of Lublin´s programmes' alumni could potentially solve some challenges. The experts shared helpful building blocks of such peer groups during both sessions:
    - Avoiding professional mentors or advisors within the groups and just providing a simple framework and moderation helps to bring enterprises together by giving them space to develop a more autonomous community on their own.
    - The role of the facilitator is important. The facilitator needs to avoid interfering too much – the group should come up with their own solutions. The facilitator only guides the process but does not provide the answers.
    - However, linking a staff member with a peer-learning group helps the business advisor build a closer connection with local companies, making it easier for signposting enterprises to other support services and projects.
    - One or two people should represent each company. They should be senior leaders (either the owner or a manager, i.e., people who can implement solutions). A recommended size for a group is 10-20 companies.
    - Involving key industry people or more ambitious companies in the peer groups encourages other entrepreneurs to aim higher. Alternatively, "disruptors" (e.g., a software developer within a manufacturing group) can also lead to exciting results as companies are challenged to look at their business from a different angle.
    - Accountability and peer pressure can be created within groups by jointly brainstorming solutions, making a public choice of what will be implemented and later updating the group on the progress. However, various programmes have taken different stances on taking meeting minutes.
    - Signing a code of conduct between group members helps build trust and ensure that there is a framework in place should anybody break that trust (e.g., a procedure to remove members).
- It takes effort to form trust with companies (the client base / previous beneficiaries of programmes). Phone calls still work best in creating positive engagement. The personal touch is vital for remaining visible to the companies. It is not enough to maintain a digital catalogue, Facebook group or a newsletter for companies (although these are useful to keep information in one place). Application forms need to be simple. Monitoring programmes´ impact can also be effectively done through 1on1 follow-up.
- Diagnostics/self-assessment tools are also useful for companies to reflect on their stage of development and inform the programme managers about the common gaps and challenges.
- After the first pilot, it becomes easier to convince other companies to join or see the value proposition. Especially useful is inviting previous participants to share their story.
- A way to keep in contact and continue collaborating with incubated businesses is to do business with them, e.g. involve them as experts in future projects or procure services.
- It is always good to invite programme alumni to field trips and other such events of new programmes. However, there should not be too many such events per year (recommended 2-3) because otherwise, it becomes about the food and not the business goals.
- It is also good to host group meetings ("PPP meetings") where companies talk openly about their progress, plans, and problems during an incubation programme. This way, a closer community of entrepreneurs is created during a programme.

- Asking for equity in an acceleration programme has its strengths and weaknesses. While start-ups would prefer the support to be free, paying for it generates more substantial commitment (e.g., pressure to prepare for meetings) and ensures more honest feedback from the companies. A better understanding of the added value can be identified with a paid programme.

- Based on the discussion, it became evident that more could be done in Lublin to build the network between business support organizations. This would improve the pipeline of business support as companies could be signposted from one organization/service to another. Lublin region could also carry out research or a self-assessment process to identify the gaps in the ecosystem.

KEY PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

Interreg Europe projects and their good practices:

- OSS: CEED Grow program
- OSS: Kovačnica Kranj – business incubator and coworking space in Kranj
- FFWD EUROPE: Buildit and Buildit Latvia
- EIS: Profitnet - building SME owner capacity through peer learning
- SCALE UP: UpScaler
- STOB Regions: Generationsskiftenetværk (Local Transfer Network) (shared via email after 13.12)

OTHER POLICY LEARNING PLATFORM RESOURCES

- Story "The digital tool for supporting entrepreneurship" about a very well-developed digital OSS system thar has been set up in Møre and Romsdal County (Norway).
- Story "The One Stop Shop as a driving force to SME smart regulation" about the Catalonian OSS.
- Results of the workshop "Mastering the digital transformation of business support".

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

The participants exchanged contact details, and experts´ slides were shared with the host region.

The host region is encouraged to submit a peer review application to get even more input from international peers. Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform peer review and matchmaking service was also promoted to experts as all European regions are eligible to apply.

Note circulation: All attendees.