

Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

Registration no. (filled in by MA/JS only) _____

Project Idea Form

Date of submission 03/06/2025

1. Project idea identification

Project idea name	Empowering Rural Startups: A Transnational Remote-First Accelerator for Innovation in Structurally Weak Regions
Short name of the project	Rural Accelerator
Previous calls	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>
Seed money support	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>

2. Programme priority

1. Innovative societies

3. Programme objective

1.1. Resilient economies and communities
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4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Stiftelsen Kiviks Museum & Arkiv
Name of the organisation (English)	The Kivik's Museum & Archives Foundation
Website	www.kiviksmuseum.se
Country	SE



Type of Partner	NGO
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Contact person 1

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Which organisation(s) in the planned partnership take part in a project within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for the first time? Please list the respective partners.

Tønder Business Council (Denmark)
Founders Bay UG (Germany)
Municipality of Nowogródek Pomorski (Poland)
Economic Development Agency of North Frisia (Germany)
District of Vorpommern-Rügen (Germany)
The Kivik's Museum & Archives Foundation (Sweden)
Latvian Youth Development Center (Latvia)

5.1 Specific challenge to be addressed

Rural areas across the Baltic Sea Region face persistent structural weaknesses, including population decline, brain drain, and a lack of innovation infrastructure. Startups and young entrepreneurs in these areas often operate in isolation, with limited access to support structures such as accelerators, incubators, or mentoring programmes. This leads to untapped potential, missed innovation opportunities, and a growing urban-rural divide in terms of economic development and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Existing support structures are typically concentrated in metropolitan regions and are not designed to address the specific needs of rural innovators. Consequently, rural communities struggle to retain young talent, diversify their local economies, and build the capacities needed for long-term transformation. Public authorities and local stakeholders frequently lack the tools, visibility, and transnational connections to initiate and sustain such change effectively.

Simultaneously, the demand for locally anchored, sustainable, and socially relevant innovations is increasing, especially in structurally weak areas. These regions often provide ideal conditions for testing and scaling future-oriented solutions – from circular economy to green tech, social entrepreneurship or digital craftsmanship – but lack the ecosystem and capacity to fully realize this potential.

This project addresses the challenge by designing and implementing a modular accelerator programme tailored to rural realities. It supports early-stage entrepreneurs and strengthens local support actors through structured mentoring, matchmaking, regional formats and transnational exchange. Startups will receive guidance from experienced founders, experts and impact investors, while public authorities, business development agencies and NGOs will be equipped to establish or expand long-term support structures.

The approach brings together municipalities, business support organisations, educational institutions, and local innovators. Their active involvement ensures long-term relevance, anchoring and capacity-building in the partner regions. The modular accelerator model will be co-created, tested, and documented across several countries to ensure scalability, replicability, and flexibility across diverse rural contexts.

5.2 Focus of the call

This project strengthens the cohesive development of rural areas in the Baltic Sea Region by addressing the lack of entrepreneurial support structures in non-urban regions. Many rural areas face depopulation, youth migration, and economic stagnation. At the same time, they offer great potential for sustainable innovation, green economy models, and place-based entrepreneurship.

Our modular remote-first accelerator programme is designed specifically for rural startups and young entrepreneurs in structurally weak regions. It empowers local actors to build tailored support structures, foster business creation, and unlock untapped local potential. Instead of replicating urban models, it adapts to regional needs and capacities through co-creation, ecosystem mapping, mentoring, and training.

The programme also fosters transnational collaboration between small places across the region, encouraging peer-learning and shared development models. Local authorities, NGOs, business support organisations and founders co-develop the content and are active in delivery and dissemination. The project creates new cooperation paths, builds trust, and encourages inclusive innovation beyond urban centres – aligning with long-term resilience and territorial cohesion goals.

6. Transnational relevance

The challenges faced by rural regions in the Baltic Sea Region – such as limited access to startup infrastructure, reduced economic opportunities, and the outmigration of young talent – are not unique to one country. These structural issues are shared across many regions in the BSR, particularly outside urban centres. A transnational approach is essential to tackle these problems effectively and avoid isolated, short-term solutions.

By working together across borders, this project facilitates the exchange of best practices, knowledge, and tools that have been successfully developed in individual regions and can be adapted to others. Small towns and rural areas often lack visibility in innovation policies – this project strengthens their voice by forming a shared transnational alliance and ecosystem for rural entrepreneurship.

A modular accelerator approach allows for local implementation while maintaining a common strategic framework. Through co-creation, joint piloting, and learning loops, partners gain new perspectives on how to engage rural youth, support local startups, and build community-based innovation capacity. Study visits, founder exchanges and international networking formats further deepen cooperation and promote cross-border connections between local innovation actors.

This cooperation helps reduce regional disparities, strengthens resilience through diversification of rural economies, and ensures that transformation processes in small places are not left behind. A shared challenge requires a shared response – and only transnational cooperation can unlock the full innovation potential of rural regions in the Baltic Sea Region.

7. Specific aims to be addressed

Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

The project fosters trust among rural innovation stakeholders across the Baltic Sea Region by creating a collaborative environment in which local public authorities, incubators, NGOs, and entrepreneurs co-design tailored accelerator formats. Joint workshops, working groups, and exchange formats enable mutual learning and long-term dialogue. Through this process, trust is built not only between institutions but also among individuals committed to supporting rural entrepreneurship. These newly established relationships serve as a foundation for future transnational cooperation beyond the scope of the project. The joint development of regional pilot accelerators and shared ownership over methods and results help to ensure continuity, transparency, and mutual benefit for all participants. The project thereby lays the groundwork for future strategic partnerships and reinforces the culture of cross-border cooperation in rural innovation.

Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

The project initiates and strengthens a Baltic Sea-wide network of stakeholders committed to supporting startups in rural areas. The network includes public administrations, innovation agencies, co-working spaces, mentors, founders, and civil society actors. With structured collaboration formats such as online accelerator sessions, thematic roundtables, peer exchanges, and a shared knowledge platform, the network is designed for long-term sustainability. Regional project partners act as multipliers and actively engage local actors and startup teams, ensuring that the network becomes embedded in existing ecosystems. By facilitating continuous interaction, the project builds a resilient support structure for rural entrepreneurship in the BSR. The inclusive and participatory design of the network encourages joint initiatives and amplifies the voice of rural innovators in regional and EU-wide innovation strategies.

Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

The project creates tangible benefits for citizens in rural communities by providing locally accessible support for entrepreneurial activity. Many rural residents face structural barriers to accessing innovation programmes, which are often concentrated in urban centers. The project breaks this pattern

by delivering mentoring, startup education, and ecosystem development directly in small towns and villages. Citizens are engaged through outreach campaigns, community events, and direct involvement in pilot accelerator programmes. In doing so, the project empowers individuals to shape the economic future of their region and actively participate in the green and digital transitions. The inclusion of youth, women, and underrepresented groups is a priority throughout the project. This ensures visibility and relevance of EU funding instruments at the local level and strengthens citizens' trust in transnational cooperation as a means to improve quality of life and economic prospects.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

The Accelerator project is designed to equip rural regions with flexible tools and collaborative mechanisms that enable rapid responses to urgent challenges. Whether due to economic shifts, demographic changes, or environmental disruptions, rural communities often lack agile support structures to adapt quickly. By co-developing modular accelerator formats and empowering local actors with the knowledge and tools to deploy them as needed, the project enhances regional resilience. The embedded monitoring and feedback mechanisms within the accelerator structure allow for quick adjustments to programme content and delivery. Furthermore, the transnational exchange fosters real-time sharing of emerging solutions and practices across borders, making it possible to replicate or adapt responses swiftly. In times of crisis or opportunity, the participating regions will be better positioned to activate their innovation ecosystems and support entrepreneurs in tackling pressing local needs.

8. Target groups

The project targets a diverse set of actors who are directly affected by the lack of entrepreneurial infrastructure in rural areas and are essential for building supportive local ecosystems:

1. Early-stage and aspiring rural entrepreneurs:

They are at the heart of the project. Many of them lack access to tailored support, mentoring, or networks. The project empowers them through training, coaching, and visibility, enabling them to create innovative solutions rooted in local needs.

2. Local public authorities and development agencies:

Municipalities and regional bodies play a key role in fostering entrepreneurship but often lack the know-how or capacity to implement startup support. The project equips them with tools, templates, and expertise to become long-term enablers of innovation.

3. Business support organisations and incubators outside metropolitan areas:

These organisations will be involved in the co-development and piloting of the accelerator model. They benefit from capacity-building, networking, and new service models that can be integrated into their ongoing work.

4. Educational and research institutions:

Universities and vocational schools in rural areas are important catalysts for innovation and talent development. They will be engaged to provide expertise, access to young talent, and help link startup support with local labour markets.

5. NGOs and civil society organisations:

As trusted community actors, they help reach underrepresented groups and contribute to inclusive approaches. Their participation ensures that social innovation is a vital part of the accelerator framework.

All groups will be actively involved throughout the project via co-creation workshops, regional needs assessments, pilot implementation, and transnational learning. They will also be primary users of the outputs and critical to ensuring project sustainability beyond its lifecycle.

Please use the drop-down list to define up to five target groups that you will involve through your project's activities.	Please define a field of responsibility or an economic sector of the selected target group	Specify the countries and regions that the representatives of this target group come from.
1. Local public authority	<i>Startup and SME support, economic and regional development, rural innovation policy.</i>	<i>Germany, Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark.</i>
2. Small and medium enterprise	<i>Local founders and early-stage startups operating in rural or semi-rural communities.</i>	<i>Germany, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Lithuania, Denmark.</i>
3. Business support organisation	<i>Startup hubs, chambers of commerce, incubators, innovation centres, development agencies.</i>	<i>Germany, Poland, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Denmark</i>
4. NGO	<i>Civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, inclusion of vulnerable and underrepresented groups.</i>	<i>Poland, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Finland, Denmark</i>
5. Education/training centre and school	<i>Vocational training, entrepreneurship education, talent development in rural regions.</i>	<i>Germany, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden.</i>

9. Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Please indicate if your project idea has the potential to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (<https://eusbsr.eu/implementation/>).

yes ☒ no ☐

Please select which policy area(s) of the EUSBSR your project idea contributes to most.

PA Innovation

PA Education

The MA/JS may share your project idea form with the respective policy area coordinator(s) of the EUSBSR. You can find contacts of PACs at the EUSBSR website (<https://eusbsr.eu/contact-us/>).

☐ If you disagree, please tick here.

10. Partnership

The project consortium brings together nine committed partners from six Baltic Sea countries, covering municipalities, business support organisations, innovation hubs and civil society actors – all with strong ties to rural development and startup ecosystems:

Tønder Business Council (Denmark) connects local enterprises, startups, and public actors in Southern Denmark and contributes to scouting and supporting rural founders in the region.

Founders Bay UG (Germany) operates one of Germany's leading rural accelerators and will coordinate the overall project implementation, including program design, founder support, and community building.

Gmina Nowogródek Pomorski (Poland) brings the perspective of a small rural municipality that actively promotes local entrepreneurship and innovation. It will serve as a local implementation site and connect the project to regional stakeholders.

EUCC Baltic Office (Lithuania) is a renowned NGO working on sustainable regional development and coastal innovation. Their expertise will support evaluation, knowledge transfer, and cross-border learning.

Wirtschaftsförderung Nordfriesland (Germany) represents one of Germany's most active regional development agencies and will provide access to SMEs, regional strategies, and policy-level support from Schleswig-Holstein.

The Kivik's Museum & Archives Foundation (Sweden) acts as a cultural and educational hub in Skåne and has supported innovation formats in peripheral regions. It will engage rural creatives and support

community-based entrepreneurship.

Landkreis Vorpommern-Rügen (Germany), as a district authority, provides institutional support for regional transformation and will foster connections between local government, civil society, and entrepreneurs.

Crazy Town Oy (Finland) is a co-working and startup support network active in several Finnish cities. It brings extensive experience in scaling local ecosystems and will contribute digital and training components.

Latvijas Jauniešu Attīstības Centrs (Latvia) focuses on youth empowerment and rural innovation in Latvia. As a civil society partner, it strengthens community involvement and inclusion of young founders in the project.

11. Workplan

The project is structured into six interconnected work phases designed to build long-term startup support capacity in rural regions across the Baltic Sea Region.

Phase 1 (Months 1–3): Project Launch & Consortium Building

The project begins with the establishment of the consortium and clear allocation of roles and responsibilities. A joint online kick-off workshop ensures alignment, introduces tools for collaboration and sets the foundation for effective project coordination and communication between partners. A visual timeline and joint task board will be implemented to streamline transnational work.

Phase 2 (Months 4–7): Needs Analysis & Ecosystem Mapping

Each participating region carries out a structured analysis of the local startup landscape, including existing support services, barriers for founders in rural contexts, and institutional gaps. Interviews with stakeholders (e.g., municipalities, incubators, founders), workshops and local site visits help to map the ecosystem and identify needs.

Phase 3 (Months 8–13): Development of Modular Accelerator Format

Based on regional findings, the project team co-develops a modular and transferable accelerator concept tailored to rural areas. The program design includes curriculum elements (mentoring, trainings, access to funding, etc.), outreach and scouting strategies, as well as tools for local implementation. A cross-regional call for applications will be prepared.

Phase 4 (Months 14–20): Pilot Implementation in Partner Regions

Each partner tests one regional remote-first accelerator batch with selected startups, using the jointly developed concept. Activities include mentoring sessions, online and in-person workshops, local networking formats and open demo days. Local stakeholders such as municipalities, universities and NGOs are integrated to strengthen regional ties. Feedback is collected from participants for improvement.

Phase 5 (Months 21–22): Knowledge Transfer & Networking

International study visits, exchange formats and peer learning workshops foster knowledge sharing across regions. A handbook with lessons learned, templates and implementation guides is published. Partners work together to build a transnational community of rural innovators and startup supporters.

Phase 6 (Months 23–24): Consolidation & Sustainability Planning

The final phase includes a public closing conference, the formulation of policy recommendations, and

sustainability planning for long-term use of the accelerator tools and formats. Strategies for integrating the program into regional development plans or funding structures are jointly developed.

Involvement of target groups:

All key stakeholders – including early-stage founders, municipalities, incubators, universities – are actively involved throughout the project via co-creation formats, feedback sessions and regional piloting. Outputs are tailored to their practical needs and will be made freely accessible for further use beyond the project.

12. Planned budget

ERDF budget (planned expenditure of partners from the EU)	EUR 500,000.00
Norwegian budget (planned expenditure of partners from Norway)	EUR XXX
Total budget (including preparatory costs)	EUR 500,000.00

13. Project consultation

Please indicate if you wish to have a consultation (online meeting) with the MA/JS to discuss your project idea

yes ☒ no ☐

14. Questions to the MA/JS

Questions related to the content of the planned project	<p><i>Can we include a mix of public authorities, NGOs, and private organisations as project partners in the same small project, or are there recommended limits or priorities?</i></p> <p><i>What level of detail is expected for the pilot activities in the application at this stage, considering the modular and locally adapted nature of our accelerator concept?</i></p> <p><i>Is there any preference or strategic advantage in having certain countries act as Lead Partner, or does this not influence the assessment?</i></p> <p><i>Can the planned outcomes also include digital infrastructure (e.g., shared platforms or knowledge hubs), or must outputs be strictly tied to physical activities?</i></p>
Questions related to budgeting and expenditure	<p><i>Is it possible to allocate parts of the partner flat rates to subcontract activities (e.g. facilitation of workshops or mentoring), or must these remain strictly within staff/overhead/internal expenses?</i></p> <p><i>Can one partner (e.g. Lead Partner) redistribute parts of its budget to support smaller partners (e.g. NGOs or municipalities) that may lack</i></p>

sufficient resources to pre-finance their full activities?

Are there specific expectations for how much of the total budget should be allocated to activities directly involving target groups versus coordination or dissemination?

Can external service providers (e.g. for communication or event logistics) be hired under a small project, and if so, are there limitations to their share in the overall budget?

Is it allowed to use part of the project budget to develop lightweight digital tools (e.g. resource platform, digital matchmaking) that support the implementation and sustainability of the accelerator?

Any other questions

Are there any recommended formats or templates for collecting Letters of Intent (LOIs) from project partners for the full application phase?

Can pilot regions outside of the core partner countries (e.g. observers or associated partners) be included in knowledge exchange activities or study visits?

Will there be joint promotional activities or communication channels supported by the Programme to highlight approved small projects?

Are there any mandatory Programme-level indicators or output targets (e.g. number of people trained, workshops held) we need to consider when designing our activity timeline?

Is there flexibility to adapt the project activities and budget between submission of the full application and project start, based on updated partner capacities?

Are there specific recommendations for structuring transnational exchange activities to ensure Programme compliance and impact?

15. Additional information

The project builds on previous experience in rural innovation and startup support, led by Founders Bay and its partners. The consortium includes actors from six countries with complementary skills and strong regional roots. Final partner confirmations are ongoing and will be completed before the full application.

Several stakeholders, including local authorities and grassroots initiatives, have expressed strong interest and are ready to actively contribute. The lead partner has experience managing EU-funded projects and ensures professional coordination. We are open to feedback and will adapt the concept accordingly.

The project's total budget is EUR 500,000, of which EUR 400,000 is requested from ERDF. The remaining 20% (EUR 100,000) will be provided by the project partners through eligible co-financing, including staff time, infrastructure use, or local public support. No Norwegian partners are involved. As the budget field in the form calculates only based on ERDF/Norway entries,

Your account in BAMOS+

Please remember that to officially submit your application you need to access our electronic data exchange system BAMOS+. More information about the process of applying for your account in BAMOS+ you will find here:

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/gateway/bamos-account>