GUIDE

Innovating for the Transitions: A Practical Guide

Methods, formats, funding and case studies to transform innovation practices and co-create solutions

June 2026

What will you find in this guide?

FOREWORD

So that the know-how does not disappear

For nearly fifteen years, I led SoScience, a pioneering company in responsible research and innovation. We supported industrial companies, researchers, social entrepreneurs, NGOs and local authorities so that they could innovate together on the major societal and environmental challenges of our time. SoScience closed its doors in 2026.

A company can come to an end; the know-how it built in the field should not disappear with it. This document gathers, reorganizes and updates the essence of what we learned: why the classic approaches to open innovation are no longer enough, what responsible innovation really is, how to choose an open innovation format suited to your ambitions, how to design and fund a collaborative impact innovation program, and what it all delivers in practice, with the evidence to back it up.

It is written for practitioners: innovation and R&D directors, sustainability and CSR leaders who want to move beyond compliance, innovation intermediaries, funders, researchers and entrepreneurs who want to collaborate with the industrial world. You can read it straight through or pick the chapter you need: each one stands on its own.

This guide is shared freely, with no commercial agenda. If its content is useful to you, pass it on: that is exactly what it is for.

My thanks go to the SoScience teams who, over the years, built and refined these practices, and in particular to Roxane Bibard and Julie Jouvencel, who helped formalize this material, as well as to the directors of our collaborative impact open innovation programs: Antoine Bertholus, Yoann Malinge, Sophie Demoures and Xavier Gascuel.

Mélanie Marcel
Founder of SoScience

CHAPTER 1

Why classic open innovation is no longer enough

From closed to open innovation

Open innovation, as theorized in the early 2000s, marked a welcome break with the paradigm of closed innovation, the belief that the best ideas must necessarily come from your own teams. This "not invented here" reflex remains one of the major obstacles to organizational resilience.

The principle of open innovation is simple: companies gain by integrating external ideas, technologies and skills to innovate more effectively and reach new markets. Rather than using patents as fortress walls, the point is to cooperate with a broader ecosystem of actors. Startups, with their sometimes iconoclastic ideas, taught large corporations a precious lesson: start from market needs to design products and services, test, iterate, validate continuously.

In twenty years, the practice has spread widely: startup sourcing, corporate incubators, innovation challenges, digital platforms, corporate venture capital (CVC). Welcome to the era of growth through networks, which complements organic growth.

The limits of the dominant model

But the dominant model is now showing its limits.

First, **commoditization**. As startup sourcing and CVC schemes become commonplace, it becomes hard to distinguish your approach in an ocean of similar operations within the same sector. Everyone meets the same startups, at the same events, with the same formats.

Second, **strategic blind spots**. Following today's trends without anticipating tomorrow's leads to missed opportunities for differentiation. Innovation driven by the short term, the kind that looks for "off-the-shelf" solutions ready to plug in, does not prepare the growth drivers of tomorrow.

Finally, and above all, **a mismatch with the problems of our time**. The challenges of the ecological, energy and social transitions are systemic problems: they cut across value chains, involve close interactions between very different actors, and their rebound effects are hard to estimate from a single vantage point. Sourcing a greentech does not answer a systemic problem.

> ***No organization, however large, holds in-house all the intelligence and skills required.***

The risk of not collaborating

For an industrial player, not engaging in deep collaboration has measurable consequences: loss of competitiveness driven by short-term focus, weakening of supply and value chains that are already fragile (the supply crises of 2021-2022 cruelly exposed organizations' lack of anticipation in the face of external shocks), and inability to build tomorrow's markets, which are taking shape precisely at the intersection of societal challenges and technological capabilities.

Open innovation must therefore evolve. Not be abandoned, but deepened: moving from sourcing solutions to co-creating answers, and integrating societal and environmental challenges not as a communication constraint, but as the very engine of innovation. That is what this guide is about.

CHAPTER 2

Responsible innovation is not CSR

A costly confusion

Let's start by clearing up the most widespread misunderstanding. Responsible innovation is not an extension of CSR. Reducing your negative externalities (decarbonizing operations, cutting water and energy consumption, incremental eco-design) is necessary, but it is not responsible innovation. It is compliance, the optimization of what already exists.

Responsible innovation belongs to research and innovation: it means **rethinking your processes, products and services to transform your business** and make your organization indispensable tomorrow: able to attract customers and talent, to access raw materials, to produce in a decarbonized way, to answer the challenges that will matter to your future customers.

Consumer and regulatory trends now demand genuine consistency between words and deeds. Branding yourself "for good" without giving yourself the means amounts to greenwashing, with a high reputational risk. Differentiation is no longer won through impact-reduction measures, which have become the minimum standard: it is won through the real transformation of the core business.

An investment logic, not an expense

This point changes everything about how you budget: responsible innovation belongs to CAPEX and rests on deep innovation. It is an engine of business strategy and a risk-management tool, because it allows you to:

- **mitigate a risk of losses** (revenues or assets): access to resources, social acceptability, regulatory change;
- **seize revenue opportunities**: new markets and innovation territories, by addressing problems that are by nature indispensable and urgent: societal and environmental problems;
- **avoid future extra costs**: the charges, expenses and investments of late adaptation.

Innovation budgets must therefore be planned with anticipation, at the level of long-term strategic ambitions, and not according to opportunities, whims and individuals.

The three pillars of impact innovation

Responsible Research & Innovation (RRI) structures this new vision by anticipating the societal repercussions of projects. Concretely, impact innovation rests on three pillars:

1. **The pursuit of sustainable and responsible solutions**, designed to solve a societal or environmental problem, not to dress up an existing offer.
2. **A multi-stakeholder approach** — researchers, companies, social entrepreneurs, NGOs, citizens, public decision-makers. Companies and researchers are no longer the sole holders of knowledge.
3. **Co-creation** — collaboration embedded at every step of the process, from qualifying the problem to experimentation, not a one-off consultation.

Three pitfalls to avoid at all costs

Field experience teaches three recurring traps:

- **Superficial innovation**: sourcing deeptech startups in no way guarantees sustainable answers. Technology is not impact.
- **Greenwashing**: not everything "green" or "organic" is necessarily sustainable.
- **Truncated impact**: limiting the thinking to the environmental dimension alone, or the social dimension alone. The two must always be considered together — an environmental solution that destroys jobs without transition, or a social solution that worsens ecological pressure, is not a solution.

> ***Impact is demonstrated, not declared.***

CHAPTER 3

The concrete benefits

Why should a company invest in a collaborative, impact-driven open innovation approach? Because it delivers tangible benefits that go far beyond communication. Here are five, observed program after program.

1. Build a strong, differentiating development strategy

Collaborative open innovation aligns your business strategy with the challenges and constraints of the ecological transition, by questioning and adapting your core business, your know-how and your scientific and technical knowledge to develop the products and services that fully answer society's needs. It is the opportunity to reinvent yourself, to take the lead by revolutionizing your market or developing new activities, and to do it at lower cost, precisely thanks to collaboration.

2. Team up with the new actors of innovation

A new generation of entrepreneurs carries a model whose main driver is the positive impact of their activities: impact startups, social entrepreneurs. Just as digital startups disrupted every sector, these actors are steering innovation toward new horizons. Collaborative open innovation lets you make them allies and partners, rather than future competitors or detractors.

3. Reduce investment risk

Co-creating hand in hand with researchers, territories, citizens, social entrepreneurs and companies from other sectors lets you anticipate the interactions among all the actors who make, buy, transport, recycle and use your products. You anticipate the acceptability of a product or service before it reaches the market and reduce the risk of innovations that are useless, obsolete, poorly accepted or without a market. Collaborative open innovation is a genuine tool for managing risk and cutting R&I costs.

4. Transform practices and accelerate innovation processes

Sustainable transformation is to this decade what digital transformation was to the previous one, only faster, and impossible to carry out in isolation. Collaborative open innovation transforms practices in depth: it extends partnerships to stakeholders rarely approached by R&D departments (NGOs, social entrepreneurs, local authorities), introduces co-creation methodologies, and imposes a culture shift built on collaboration, openness and experimentation. R&D departments, often sidelined by CSR initiatives, are here on the front line of the transformation.

5. Attract and retain the best talent

Faced with a young workforce in search of meaning and consistency, the authenticity of commitment has become a decisive attractiveness factor. New entrants to the job market are acutely aware of the impacts of their career choices. A real (and not declarative) impact innovation approach proves through action that the company does more than talk.

The 14 benefits of open innovation

From strategic leadership to talent attractiveness: the full picture.

1
TAKE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

2
EXPLORE NEW SOLUTIONS

3
IDENTIFY NEW MARKETS

4
IDENTIFY NEW PARTNERS

5
BENEFIT FROM COMPLEMENTARY EXPERTISE

6
STIMULATE CREATIVITY

7
ANTICIPATE REGULATION AND STANDARDS

8
REDUCE THE RISKS AND COST OF INNOVATION

9
ENSURE THE ACCEPTABILITY OF INNOVATIONS

10
BUILD SKILLS IN NEW SECTORS

11
TRANSFORM THE COMPANY'S PRACTICES

12
ACCELERATE EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

13
COMMUNICATE ON YOUR ROLE IN SOCIETY

14
ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT

Source: SoScience, 2024.

CHAPTER 4

Choosing your open innovation format

Open innovation is not limited to collaborating with startups. It covers a palette of formats that do not serve the same objectives and do not demand the same level of commitment. The format an organization chooses says a lot about its real maturity and ambitions in innovation. Let's review them, with their strengths and their limits.

(A useful clarification: coalitions and think tanks, useful for intelligence and strategic reflection, are not open innovation formats.)

Format 1 — Strategic partnerships and partnership-based research

Partnerships between industry and research (chairs, joint laboratories, consortia) have existed for a long time and are fruitful: they combine resources, knowledge and expertise to accelerate the development of solutions.

Limits: they take time to set up; the big players work among themselves; projects remain within an industrial-technical approach, without structured integration of social and environmental impact criteria, and with little attention to weak societal signals.

Format 2 — Incubators and accelerators

They offer startups resources, mentoring and networks, and give companies organized access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Limits: the support is often theoretical, strong on commercial and marketing aspects but weak on the rest. The more recent "innovation studio" approach partly fixes this by supporting projects with real entrepreneurs.

Format 3 — Classic innovation challenges

Calls for ideas and startups in a competitive setting, they stimulate creativity and offer visibility.

Limits: corporate challenges have a very *business as usual* focus that does not allow going beyond an innovation that is already steered (those funded by foundations are generally more impact-oriented). A challenge that is too vague or multi-themed attracts irrelevant applications; one that is too technical minimizes the societal issues that are nonetheless part of the problem.

Format 4 — Open innovation platforms

Digital platforms make ecosystem management easier: finding and managing partners, prioritizing internal ideas, organizing challenges, managing a project portfolio. The time savings are real, and they avoid duplicated initiatives.

Limits: the absence of collective intelligence. The experts identified are then approached in a bilateral relationship: you stay in sourcing, not in co-creation.

Format 5 — Collaborative, impact-driven open innovation

This is the fusion of open innovation and responsible innovation: ecosystem innovation, which aligns business challenges with planetary and social constraints, and brings together actors of all kinds (scientists, industrial companies, social entrepreneurs, NGOs, public sector) to co-create solutions to complex problems. The interaction between actors and sectors creates a space for dialogue and serendipity that enables breakthrough innovation, the kind that does not yet exist on a shelf.

It is also the most demanding format: it requires time, real commitment from the teams, and professional facilitation between worlds that share neither the same language nor the same pace.

Which format for which objective?

Let's be direct, because this is the heart of the decision. In the palette of open innovation formats, the right formula is the one aligned with your real objective:

OBJECTIVE

Recruit, communicate, engage your stakeholders, support a cultural transformation

The classic formats (challenges, incubators, school partnerships) may be enough.

OBJECTIVE

Run market intelligence and enrich your deal flow (notably CVC)

Sourcing and platforms are well suited.

OBJECTIVE

Innovate on services or on digital

The classic formats, internal or with students, work.

OBJECTIVE

Innovate deeply: deeptech, research-based innovation, systemic problems

You must go beyond sourcing existing solutions. You must co-create, with a diversity of actors, on a timescale that is that of partnership-based research.

OUR CONVICTION

Only collaborative, impact-driven open innovation answers the ambition of deep innovation.

It accelerates the timescale of research by seeking new applications for work in progress, by connecting actors who take far too long to find each other, and by stimulating original collaborations. Choosing a lighter format is perfectly legitimate: every objective has its tool. But make no mistake: if you want deep innovation for the problems of our time, sourcing will not get you there.

CHAPTER 5

Running a successful collaborative impact innovation program

From here on, we are no longer talking about open innovation in the broad sense. We focus on the format that, in our view, is THE format suited to today's challenges: the collaborative impact innovation program. Here, condensed, are the keys of the method drawn from some fifteen years of practice.

Key #1 — Bring together the right diversity of experts

A complex problem is not solved among peers. You must select and gather, upstream of the program and throughout the process, experts covering every dimension of the subject: position in the value chain, scientific disciplines, but also social and geographical diversity. In-house, you almost never have all the expertise required: you must open up, including to actors that R&D departments never approach.

Key #2 — Frame the problem before launching

Launching a call that is too vague or multi-themed attracts unqualified applications; an overly technical approach narrows the outcomes and evacuates the societal issues that are part of the solution. Problem framing (precisely defining the question you want to answer, crossing the business, technical, scientific, social and environmental dimensions) is the most structuring step. It forces you to leave the beaten track and look at your subject from new angles, considering the whole problem and not just your domain of expertise or your market.

Key #3 — Build every actor's skills on impact

Creating impact innovations requires specific knowledge, correlated to societal and environmental challenges. The program must support this skill-building: by working on real, complex projects, participants develop capabilities that will serve well beyond the program. This collective learning dimension is a deliverable in its own right, and it can produce commons, such as public state-of-the-art reports.

Key #4 — Align the problems with societal and environmental challenges

This is what guarantees that the innovations produced will have value and a positive impact. And it is what makes the exercise so demanding: you must get actors to collaborate who, by nature, are rarely aligned. Their visions, their languages, their working rhythms and their stakes differ. It is precisely this challenge of bringing them together that gives the result its value.

Key #5 — Adopt a project-mode approach, over time

> ***A collaborative innovation program does not end with an event day, an award ceremony or a pitch session.***

Three requirements:

- **Test and iterate**: experiments are the source of solid learning that serves the final objectives.
- **Ensure the continuity of the collaborations** initiated, to build on the first positive effects.
- **Follow the emerging projects** with regular milestones, set at 6 or 9 months minimum, to genuinely give them the means to prove themselves.

Key #6 — Professionalize facilitation

Getting actors who differ by nature and by aspiration to collaborate is no small matter. It requires a good knowledge of the different audiences, an ability to bridge between them, and resources dedicated to facilitating interactions. Concretely, you must know how to translate between stakeholders who do not share the same vision, the same language, the same pace or the same stakes. A trusted third party, neutral and credible with every world (scientific, industrial, non-profit), is often decisive.

Done well, this mechanism produces a double engine: emulation (the prospect of solving real problems drives participants to give their best) and co-creation, where everyone learns from the others, shares skills and builds solutions that none could have designed alone.

CHAPTER 6

Funding the exploration: the logic before the schemes

"We want to do responsible innovation, but we don't have the budgets to explore new avenues." This sentence, heard dozens of times, rests on a reasoning error: waiting for external funding before starting. Here is the logic that works, illustrated by the French case as we practiced it in 2024; the schemes evolve, the reasoning remains.

First, understand the internal obstacles

Silo-based operation is the first obstacle. R&D funds the long-term subjects, through research partnerships with long timescales, designed among actors of the same sector with the same technical lens. Business units fund short-term innovation: near off-the-shelf solutions, reactive and incremental. Open innovation, for its part, rarely has its own budget. The result: the two pillars of technical innovation struggle to collaborate on medium- and long-term challenges, exactly where the growth drivers of tomorrow are decided.

> ***Funding is built from the inside out.***

Then, structure internal funding in four steps

1. **Survey the field**: collect, in sprint format (two months maximum), the problems and needs your teams identify in contact with customers, aligned with corporate strategic objectives and R&D roadmaps.
2. **Prioritize** with a criteria grid crossing the economic (market and duplication potential), the technical (maturity level, obstacles to lift), impact (environmental and societal risks, impact projection) and collaboration potential (possible partners and funding).
3. **Trigger** initial internal funding, at corporate level and in pilot business units, and if possible, mandate the field teams to obtain client co-funding.
4. **Explore and launch the pilot**: communicate the challenge to your ecosystems to identify committed partners, ready to co-invest at your side.

These steps can fit within six months. And they change the nature of the subject: it is no longer about "finding a budget," but about systematizing exploration cycles on strong innovation challenges.

Next, leverage public funding

Once the process is under way with initial internal funding, public leverage becomes accessible. The logic to remember:

- **The schemes follow the maturity continuum**: pre-maturation and maturation (validation of a scientific concept, first obstacles), proof of concept and prototyping, development and industrialization, then commercialization, not forgetting the tax schemes. The appendix of this report gives the France/Europe overview, dated 2024.
- **The underlying trend, national and European, is to integrate environmental and social criteria.** At the European level, Horizon Europe funding requires spelling out the project's "pathway to impact." A well-built responsible innovation project therefore starts with a structural advantage.
- **Weigh the time-to-success ratio**: building an application is expensive in time. For European schemes in particular, support from specialists is often worth the cost.

Finally, pool resources through private co-funding

Allying with actors aligned with your challenges allows you to share financial risks, pool resources, access larger funding and gain credibility with public funders. In return, anticipate from the outset the sharing of benefits and the management of intellectual property: late alignment costs months.

Three elements make the difference in an application: demonstrating social and environmental impact (including contribution to the SDGs), the quality and diversity of the consortium, and the existence of a solid support network. Three mistakes sink applications: lack of clarity, underestimating risks (notably social acceptability and access to resources), and the absence of a profitability plan.

The four non-negotiables

To secure funding and carry a responsible innovation approach over time, four conditions cannot be negotiated:

1. **A strategic vision and ambition** carried by top management, shareholders included, to reconcile the core business with planetary constraints, and to give it the human and financial means.
2. **The mobilization of every function**, with bridges to ease internal communication and collaboration.
3. **Positive impact criteria and an upstream evaluation process** for projects, to quickly discard ideas that are not sustainable.
4. **A change of mindset in innovation management**: more anticipation, collaboration, openness and agility, which are not the historical attributes of R&D culture.

CHAPTER 7

Two programs, two proofs

The method described in the previous chapter is not theoretical: it was tested for nearly ten years through "The Future Of," the flagship collaborative impact open innovation approach developed by SoScience. Its principle: a program of about ten months on a theme linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, bringing together 30 to 50 international experts of all kinds to co-create projects, then supporting them over time.

The box below gives the measure of what this approach produced in eight years. The two case studies that follow show how it works, from the inside, with the success factors but also the points of vigilance that any practitioner should know before getting started.

2016 – 2024 · "THE FUTURE OF" IN FIGURES

18
programs delivered: food waste, packaging, urban waters, textile recycling, health, biomass, mobility…

9,500+
experts approached around the world

667
participants selected

12/17
Sustainable Development Goals addressed

181
collaborative projects created, of which 94 formalized within the first month

36
projects supported over time

€12M+
raised by the projects within two years of their creation — including more than €7M with SoScience's direct support

Diversity is the strength: participant typology

Average distribution observed across the 13 documented programs. "Support": innovation support organizations. A method recognized by the UN as a good practice for the Sustainable Development Goals.

CASE STUDY #1

The Future Of Positive Packaging — with Perrier (Nestlé Waters)

The context

In 2019, Perrier set out to tackle the question of its packaging in depth: beyond recycling, reinventing packaging to aim for positive impact. The brand built on The Future Of method.

How it unfolded

The program followed the three standard phases over about ten months:

Scoping and problem framing. A one-day workshop bringing together marketing, communication, innovation, technical, procurement and top management, to define a problem statement answering both Perrier's industrial challenges and social and environmental issues. This step is decisive: it conditions the quality of the call for applications and the relevance of the matchmaking.

Call for applications and selection. More than 390 actors contacted directly across scientific, entrepreneurial and non-profit networks; 89 applications received, including startups that Perrier and Nestlé had been trying to reach for years without success. 43 experts selected, including staff from Perrier and Nestlé.

Co-creation day. 36 participants gathered at Station F (Paris), with facilitation tools dedicated to formalizing collaborations. The result: 15 collaborative project intentions by the end of the day, and a 100% satisfaction rate in the evaluation survey.

Selection and support. 3 winning projects announced at the ChangeNOW 2020 summit, covering the whole value chain — **Biotic** (bio-based, biodegradable and recyclable plastic), **Flexikeg** (distribution in reusable containers) and **PlastiSkul** (local micro-factories for plastic waste valorization) — each receiving launch funding and six months of support (project management, network, fundraising).

CLIENT VOICE

"A network of startups and researchers we do not have access to."

"Let's face reality: we are not experts in this kind of transformation, and we really need support. What they brought to us is a different way to look upon our problems."

Perrier / Nestlé Waters teams — program debrief

The key success factors

Identified when the UN recognized this method as a good practice for the SDGs: the diversity of the experts; the framing of a problem aligning economic, technical and societal challenges; facilitation by a trusted third party expert in collaborative intelligence; and the scoping of projects with stakeholder alignment to secure execution.

Practitioner lessons

Every program of this kind meets the same points of vigilance, and knowing them in advance saves months:

- Identify the chain of command from launch and bring the influential stakeholders on board, or face delays at every milestone.
- Prepare the support phase as soon as the winners are selected: detail activities, roadmaps and budgets to secure the resources to be committed.
- Engage actors for the long run, independently of the people in place: team turnover and leadership changes are the first risks of long programs.
- Anticipate the weight of internal processes (procurement, legal) for startups living at another pace: train referents in every department involved.

CASE STUDY #2

The Future Of Waste — with Diana (Symrise)

The context

In 2018, Diana, a natural ingredients player, tackled with SoScience a complex subject: the industrial valorization of co-products from the fruit and vegetable value chains. A subject that crosses the entire value chain and cannot be handled by a single function or a single sector.

How it unfolded, and the results

More than 200 experts approached, 80 applications, around fifty participants selected, from ten countries, gathered for a co-creation day structured around thematic workshops and the "collaboration wall," the tool for formalizing projects at the end of the day. Twenty collaborative projects were created, three of which were supported over time.

The program also produced a common good: a complete thematic report of around a hundred pages on the challenges of food waste and valorization, framed by the SDGs and presenting an overview of emerging solutions, shared publicly. It is a concrete illustration of key #3 from the previous chapter: a well-designed program produces shared knowledge, not just deals.

CLIENT VOICE

"Working with SoScience in a very collaborative spirit allowed us to tackle one of our main challenges: bringing the right people together around a complex subject, the industrial valorization of the fruit & vegetable value chains. I personally met people I would never have met in my daily professional activities. We know of no other company that could support such projects by bringing together such a diverse ecosystem of academic researchers, startups, social entrepreneurs, small and large companies and industries.

The process, highly structured, helps you define the questions you want to answer. It somehow forces you to leave the beaten track and look at your subject from new angles, considering the subject as a whole and not just your domain of expertise. It is the best way to find answers to a global challenge! To benefit fully, be ready to commit fully to this collaborative work: you need to devote time to the exchanges so your challenge can be properly understood and a relevant program designed.

I have taken part in many workshops in my career, but I must say that the day of The Future Of Waste program was the most inspiring workshop I have ever attended. Why? First of all, every participant was carefully selected to cover every dimension of our subject, in terms of position in the value chain but also of social diversity: ten countries were represented. Second, the participants were in a positive mindset, open to learning, sharing and collaborating. Third, the event was perfectly designed, with different sessions throughout the day, including a period dedicated to formalizing potential collaborations and the famous collaboration wall. That is one of the strengths of this program: not settling for a pleasant day sharing ideas with inspiring people (which is often the case in corporate workshops) but formalizing potential projects with new partners."

Denis Guyonnet, Scientific Director, Diana Nova

CONCLUSION

Passing it on

Fifteen years in the field taught me one simple thing: the problems of our time will not be solved by organizations that innovate alone, nor by innovations that ignore the society they land in. They will be solved by improbable collectives (a researcher in microfluidics, an NGO in direct contact with future beneficiaries, a fast-growing startup and a local authority looking for solutions) provided someone takes the trouble to bring them together, to help them understand each other, and to give their projects the means to last.

That practice does not require genius. It requires method, honesty about one's own limits, and the conviction that social and environmental impact is not a constraint on innovation but its most powerful engine. Everything in this guide has been tried, sometimes failed, corrected, then validated in the field. It is now in your hands.

SoScience no longer exists. The practice, for its part, is only waiting to spread. Make it yours.

APPENDIX

Funding landmarks, France / Europe (as of 2024)

Caveat. This overview reflects the schemes available in 2024, as SoScience worked with them. Schemes evolve frequently and specific calls for projects are regularly launched according to strategic priorities. Check the funders' websites for up-to-date information, and get support (innovation consulting firms, competitiveness clusters, economic development agencies) to identify the schemes best suited to your project.

A. Pre-maturation and maturation

Funding the passage from fundamental research to technological development: initial validation of a concept, assessment of transfer potential, first experiments, identification of obstacles, preliminary analysis of applications, intellectual property strategy.

- Pre-maturation programs of the **SATT** (French technology transfer acceleration companies)
- **National Valorization Fund (FNV)** managed by the ANR (French National Research Agency)
- **ANR Emergence program**
- Internal programs of research organizations (CNRS, INRIA, CEA) — accessible if your project is run early enough with a researcher from these organizations
- Regional pre-maturation schemes

B. Proof of concept and prototyping

Most often grants and repayable advances.

- Regional funding; the **IRT** and **CRT** centers (see AFCRT to identify local resources, especially for SMEs)
- **i-Nov innovation competition** (Bpifrance)
- **Deeptech development aid** (Bpifrance)

Partnership-based research, with co-funding:

- **ANR LabCom program** (joint laboratories between public research and SMEs/mid-caps)
- **Carnot Institutes** (partnership research between labs and companies)
- **Competitiveness clusters** (matchmaking and guidance toward the right schemes)

C. Development and industrialization

- **Future Investment Programs (PIA4)**: ecological transition, industrial competitiveness, digital, health
- **Fund for Innovation and Industry (FII)**: AI, nanoelectronics, energy storage, cybersecurity
- **Bpifrance innovation aid** (including the Innovation Development Aid)
- **i-démo** (structuring R&D&I projects)

D. Tax schemes and commercialization

- **Research Tax Credit (CIR)** and **Innovation Tax Credit (CII)**
- Seed loans (Bpifrance), **French Tech Seed**, sector investment funds (e.g. the SPI fund for industry)

E. At the European level

- **Horizon Europe**: EIC Pathfinder (advanced research), EIC Transition (technology validation), EIC Accelerator (development and go-to-market). Reminder: 100% of Horizon Europe funding requires spelling out the project's "pathway to impact."
- **LIFE program** (environmental projects), **Digital Europe**, **InvestEU**
- **EIB** instruments: InnovFin, European Guarantee Fund
- Inter-regional cooperation: **Interreg Europe**, **EUREKA** (including Eurostars for SMEs)

At the European level even more than nationally, support from specialized firms is recommended to weigh the time invested against the chances of success.

F. What funders look at

Classic criteria: technological innovation, economic viability, implementation capacity. Strong trend: environmental and social impact criteria, now decisive in the scoring of many calls. After the award (grants, recoverable advances or zero-interest loans), plan for monitoring: interim reports, site visits, technical evaluations, and a final report detailing results, impacts and lessons learned.