

Start-Up Hub

2026-2027 Program Guide



Accelerating innovation for
sustainable digital infrastructure

Net Zero Innovation Hub Executive Partners:

About the Start-Up Hub

The Net Zero Start-Up Hub helps innovative companies navigate one of the world's most complex and rapidly evolving industries: digital infrastructure.

Designed specifically for innovative companies developing emerging technologies relevant to data centers, the program combines industry knowledge, commercial development, and direct access to leading operators, technology companies, and experts from across the European data center ecosystem.

Many of tomorrow's data center technologies already exist - they were simply developed for other industries. The Start-Up Hub also helps companies explore how mature technologies can be adapted, validated, and prepared for deployment within data center environments.

Through workshops, one-on-one mentoring, expert sessions, and direct engagement with Hub members, participants strengthen their product-market fit, gain a deeper understanding of the industry value chain, and prepare their technologies for commercialization and future deployment opportunities.

The Start-Up Hub is a flagship initiative under the Net Zero Innovation Hub for Data Centers' approach to identifying, testing, and de-risking new technologies for the data center industry.

STEP 1: SELECTION

June - September 2026

APPLY & PITCH

Shared industry requirements are translated into Call for innovation.

Timeline & Application Process

- **Application Deadline:** 31 August 2026
- **Notice of participation in Pitch event:** 8 September
- **Pitch Event and selection:** 22 September 2026

STEP 2: ONBOARDING

October - December 2026

ONBOARDING & ROADMAPS

Onboarding meetings to define Project and KPI cards for the incubation program.

- Goals and expectations for joining the start-up hub
- Define success criteria
- Identify gaps in skills/knowledge

STEP 3: INCUBATION PROGRAM

January - June 2027

INCUBATION PROGRAM

The 6-month tailored program combines in-person workshops, virtual sessions, one-on-one mentoring, and industry events to balance practical learning with flexibility.

STEP 4: MENTORSHIP

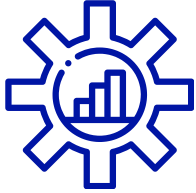
June 2027 - ongoing

MENTORSHIP & ALUMNI COMMUNITY

Alumni remain part of the Hub community, receive continued access to networking opportunities, and may be invited to future events, mentoring activities, innovation calls, and collaboration opportunities as relevant.

Why join the Net Zero Start-up Hub?

Built for the Data Center Industry



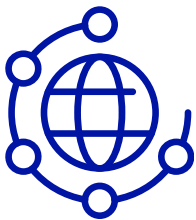
Unlike other incubator programs, every part of the program is designed specifically for companies developing technologies relevant to digital infrastructure. From the curriculum and mentors to industry engagement and networking opportunities, the program is tailored to the needs of the European data center ecosystem.

Industry-Led insights



The 6-month incubation program combines in-person workshops, virtual sessions, one-on-one mentoring, and industry events. The program is built around real challenges identified by leading organizations across the European data center industry, providing a unique perspective on customer needs, procurement processes, market trends, and the evolving data center value chain.

Access to the Ecosystem



Connect directly with leading data center operators, technology companies, engineering firms, investors, and industry experts. Build relationships across the European data center ecosystem while gaining a deeper understanding of the market and the technologies shaping the digital and energy transition.

Investor Engagement



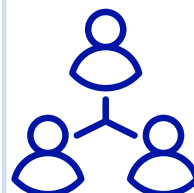
The Hub leverages its connections to the investor ecosystem and initiatives such as the EU Clean Energy Systems Program to bridge the gap between innovation, industry, and investment. By combining industry engagement with investor access, we help connect emerging technologies to real-world validation and deployment opportunities while supporting the development of scalable, investable solutions.

Validation Opportunities



Explore pathways toward pilot projects and future technology demonstrations within the Hub ecosystem. While validation projects are not guaranteed, the program is designed to strengthen your commercial and technical readiness for future opportunities.

Workspace & Community

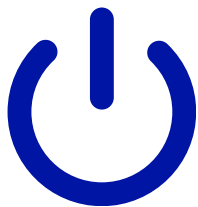


The Net Zero Innovation Hub is your home-away-from-home throughout the program. Participants are welcome to work from the Hub outside of scheduled activities, providing opportunities to collaborate with fellow founders, engage with Hub staff, and become part of the community.

Innovation Focus Areas

Each year, the Start-Up Hub focuses on innovation challenges identified through the Net Zero Innovation Hub's strategic priorities.

2026 - 2027 Start-Up Hub Focus Areas



Power

Technologies supporting resilient, low-carbon power systems for digital infrastructure, including:

- Clean onsite generation
- Grid integration and flexibility
- Long-duration energy storage (LDES)
- Power distribution
- High-voltage DC architectures



Heat reuse/ Heat-to-X

Technologies that create value from waste heat, including:

- Heat-to-water
- Heat-to-power
- Carbon capture
- Biomass
- District energy
- Other Heat-to-X applications



Efficiency

With a specific focus on AI-driven applications for energy efficiency. Technologies improving operational performance and sustainability, including:

- AI-enabled optimization
- Intelligent controls
- Digital twins
- Automation



Who should apply?

The program is designed for innovative companies developing technologies relevant to the future of sustainable digital infrastructure. No prior experience with the data center industry is needed.

We welcome applications from the EMEA region.

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Address one or more of the program's innovation focus areas.
- TRL 5-7 (Reference TRL is 6)
- Be ready to demonstrate their technology in a relevant environment within the next 6–18 months.
- Have strong potential for scalability.
- Be available to participate in the in-person Pitch Day in Fredericia, Denmark, on September 22, 2026.
- Be committed to actively participating throughout the six-month program, including four in-person sessions in Fredericia, Denmark.

The program is designed to meet companies where they are. We will work with selected companies across technical validation and commercial readiness to explore credible pathways to scale in data center environments.



How we evaluate applications

Initial selection

During the initial selection, the Hub team reviews every application that we receive. Selected companies will be invited to pitch at the pitch event.

Pitch Event

At the pitch event on 22 September, a panel of external expert judges will evaluate the pitches and overall potential of each of the participating companies.

Up to 10 companies will be selected to join the incubation program.

Evaluation criteria:

- Innovation
- Technical Maturity
- Market Relevance
- Adoption Readiness
- Team
- Strategic Fit

How to apply & Key Dates

July 2026	Applications open
August 31, 2026	Application deadline
September 1-7, 2026	Initial Application review and selection for Pitch
September 8, 2026	Selected applicants invited to Pitch day
September 22, 2026	Pitch day and final selection (Fredericia, Denmark)
October-December, 2026	Onboarding and program preparation
January 12-14, 2026	Incubation program kick-off (Fredericia, Denmark)

NET ZERO
INNOVATION HUB FOR DATA CENTERS



Ready to Apply?

Scan the QR code or visit netzerodatacenters.com to submit your application.

Your Journey through the Start-Up Hub

STEP 1 PITCH & SELECTION

**JUNE -
SEPTEMBER 2026**

KEY DATES

- 31 August 2026: Application deadline
- 8 September: Initial selection for Pitch event
- 22 September: Pitch event and selection in Fredericia

At the Pitch Event on 22 September 2026 in Fredericia, three outstanding teams will receive direct financial awards (sponsored by Google):

1st Prize: EUR 10,000

2nd Prize: EUR 7,000

3rd Prize: EUR 5,000



STEP 2: ONBOARDING & ROADMAPS

**OCTOBER -
DECEMBER 2026**

WHAT TO EXPECT

Individual onboarding meetings to align expectations, meet the team and get started on your individual roadmaps

The goal of these meetings is to discuss and define together:

- Goals and expectations for joining the start-up hub
- Define success criteria
- Identify gaps in skills/knowledge and set requirements for mentoring



STEP 3: INCUBATION PROGRAM

**JANUARY - JUNE
2027**

WHAT TO EXPECT

The 6-month tailored incubation program combines in-person workshops, virtual sessions, one-on-one mentoring, and industry events to balance practical learning with flexibility.

MODULE 1 (Q1 2027)

Module 1 will focus on understanding the data center industry, building relationships within the sector, and adapting your product-market fit

Key date

January 12-14: Program Kickoff

MODULE 2 (Q2 2027)

Module 2 continues with focus on the incubation program focus areas, but will be tailor-made as we support you with individual milestones and objectives from your roadmaps.



STEP 4: MENTORSHIP & NETWORK

**JUNE 2027 -
ONGOING**

WHAT TO EXPECT

Graduation marks the beginning of your long-term engagement with the Net Zero Innovation Hub. Alumni remain part of the Hub community, receive continued access to networking opportunities, and may be invited to future events, mentoring activities, innovation calls, and collaboration opportunities as relevant.

Throughout 2027, you will have access to assigned mentors.

Incubation Program Focus Areas

Industry Ecosystem

Understand how the European data center industry is structured, including key stakeholders, market trends, and the role of digital infrastructure in the energy transition.

Supply Chain

Learn how technologies move through the data center supply chain, how innovation enters the data center industry, and how to identify customers, partners, and routes to market.

Product-Market Fit

Gain a deeper understanding of the European data center market and refine your solution for real customer needs.

Commercialization

Strengthen your business model, value proposition, and commercialization strategy.

Mentorship

Receive guidance from experienced professionals across technology, business, and innovation.

Networking

Connect directly with leading operators, technology companies, engineering firms, and industry experts.

Investment Readiness.

Gain insights into fundraising, investor expectations, and preparing your company for growth.

Validation Opportunities

Explore pathways toward pilot projects and future technology demonstrations within the Hub ecosystem.

Communication & Storytelling

Develop a compelling narrative while strengthening your pitching and presentation skills.

Alumni Community

Continue building connections through our growing network of founders, mentors, and industry partners.



FAQ

Is the program focused on software, hardware, or both?

We welcome applications from companies developing hardware, software, digital solutions, materials, energy technologies, and other innovations relevant to the future of sustainable digital infrastructure.

Is there a participation fee?

No, there is no participation fee.

How many startups will be selected?

Up to ten startups will be selected for the 2027 cohort.

Can more than one person from my company participate?

Yes. While we recommend identifying one primary participant, additional team members are welcome to participate in relevant workshops and activities where appropriate.

Who covers travel expenses?

Participants are responsible for arranging and covering their own travel and accommodation unless otherwise communicated.

The Hub can provide recommendations for hotels and travel. Some common transport and meals will be included during site visits and external events.

Can international startups apply?

Yes, we are open to applications for companies from the EMEA region. Please note that participants are expected to attend all scheduled in-person activities in Denmark.

How much time should I expect to commit?

While your output of the program is dependent on your input, the program is designed to fit alongside the day-to-day demands of building a startup, while requiring active participation throughout the six-month incubation period.

You can expect the following from the incubation program:

- Onboarding meetings in October - December (+ preparation time)
- 4 in-person meetups (2 days) taking place in Denmark (+ preparation time)
- 3-6 webinars
- Participation and pitch at Data Centers Denmark Conference (28-29 April 2027)
- 1:1 meetings with mentors

Each in-person hub meetup will consist of a mixture of common workshops and site visits, individual meetings, and time for working and networking from the start-up hub facilities in Fredericia.

Additional meetups, conferences, & meetings may be arranged as needed for specific needs, i.e. testing.

Do I need to relocate to Denmark?

No. The program combines virtual activities with scheduled in-person meetups in Fredericia, Denmark. Participants are expected to attend the in-person sessions but do not need to relocate.

Do I keep my intellectual property?

Yes. The Hub claims no rights to intellectual property. If you require us to sign an NDA or similar, please get in touch.

Who owns the results of collaborations or pilot projects?

Any future collaboration, pilot project, or commercial agreement will be negotiated directly between the participating organizations. Participation in the Start-Up Hub does not transfer ownership of intellectual property or create obligations to enter into commercial agreements.

Does the program provide funding?

The Start-Up Hub is not an investment program. While funding is not guaranteed, participants receive guidance on investment readiness and may have opportunities to engage with investors through the Hub's ecosystem.

Will the program help me secure pilot projects?

Pilot projects are not guaranteed. However, the program is designed to prepare startups for future validation opportunities by strengthening product-market fit, industry readiness, and relationships with Hub members.

Depending on the fit and readiness of your technology, you may be eligible for access to our network of European testing sites.

What happens after graduation?

After graduation, it's up to you to keep the momentum going.

Graduation marks the beginning of your long-term engagement with the Net Zero Innovation Hub. Alumni remain part of the Hub community, receive continued access to networking opportunities, and may be invited to future events, mentoring activities, innovation calls, and collaboration opportunities as relevant.

Need help navigating our
application process?
Please contact:



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Press or general inquiries?
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Ready to Apply?

Scan the QR code
or visit netzerodatacenters.com to submit your
application.

About the Net Zero Innovation Hub

The Net Zero Innovation Hub for Data Centers unites leaders of the data center industry to accelerate the deployment of advanced net zero solutions. Led by APL, Danfoss, Data4, Google, Microsoft, Schneider Electric, and Vertiv, the Hub de-risks innovation by removing technical, commercial, regulatory, and financial risks.

Through a unique and structured collaborative innovation methodology, its goal is to support sustainable data center growth while enabling the transition toward a net-zero future.

The start-up hub is a flagship initiative under the Net Zero Innovation Hub for Data Centers' approach to identifying, testing, and de-risking new technologies for the data center industry.