Funding and Evaluating Innovation Matchmaking Platforms:
Matching Policy Support to Policy Goals

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Based on a comparative study of seven corporate-startup matchmaking platforms across Sweden, Germany, Finland, and Chile.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Matchmaking platforms are not neutral brokers; they shape who gets access, which ideas are legitimized, and what outcomes are pursued.
- The study identifies four platform models: external orchestration, internal capability-building, relational ecosystem, and embedded co-location.
- Structured platforms are stronger for fast pilots, mission delivery, and accountability; relational platforms are stronger for trust-building, inclusion, and long-term capability development.
- Different platform models need different funding horizons, governance expectations, and performance metrics.
- Policy should support a portfolio of platform types rather than judging all innovation intermediaries by the same short-term KPIs.

What is the problem/what was studied?

Governments, innovation agencies, and firms increasingly use matchmaking platforms to connect startups, scaleups, research actors, and established companies. These platforms are often treated as simple brokerage tools and judged by the number of matches or pilots they generate. This study compares seven platforms across sectors and countries to show how platform design and governance shape outcomes for access, trust, legitimacy, and collaboration.

What were the findings? What's new?

The study identifies four platform models. External orchestration platforms use structured challenge calls and pilot processes to deliver fast problem-solution matches focused on a specific mission. Internal capability-building platforms embed startup collaboration within incumbent firms, enabling them to learn to absorb external ideas. Ecosystem relational platforms create open, trust-based spaces for learning, networking, and gradual collaboration. Embedded colocation platforms place startups close to corporate R&D, enabling informal exchange and early exploration.

Table 1: Overview of four different platform models and best fit

PLATFORM MODELS AND BEST FIT	
External orchestration Mission-driven challenges, clear problem-solution matching, and fast pilots.	**Internal capability-building** Embedding startup collaboration inside firms to renew routines and absorptive capacity.
Ecosystem relational Place-based and inclusive innovation is built on trust, learning, and broad participation.	**Embedded colocation** Science-based and deep-tech fields where proximity and tacit knowledge matter.

The main finding is that these platforms are not interchangeable. Governance concerns who defines priorities, organizes access, coordinates collaboration, and is accountable for results. Across the four models, these functions are organized through formal challenge and pilot processes, internal corporate routines, ecosystem facilitation, or sustained co-location and interaction. Structured models are useful when policy needs targeted problem-solving and visible delivery targeting a specific mission. Relational and colocated models are stronger when policy aims to build trust, capability, inclusion, and longer-term ecosystem development.

Why does this matter?

For policy, the main lesson is that there is no single best platform design. Different policy goals call for different collaboration infrastructures. Funding and evaluation should therefore reflect what a platform is designed to do. Applying one generic set of short-term KPIs risks rewarding only rapid pilot activity while undervaluing the trust-building, learning, inclusion, and capability development needed for durable transformation.

WHAT IS THE ROAD AHEAD FOR POLICY?

- Build a portfolio of platform types rather than funding only challenge-driven or pilot-focused intermediaries.
- Match instruments to goals: structured orchestration for mission delivery, capability-building for incumbent renewal, relational platforms for place-based inclusion, and co-location for science-based and deep-tech fields.
- Use broader evaluation metrics, including network growth, diversity of participation, trust-building, follow-on collaboration, and absorptive capability - not only pilots or procurements.
- Provide longer and more flexible funding horizons for platforms whose main value lies in learning, co-creation, legitimacy, and ecosystem development.
- Treat matchmaking platforms as policy infrastructure and align governance with platform purpose by clarifying who sets priorities, determines participation, coordinates collaboration, and is accountable for outcomes.

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