AcceleratorApp
Software for Accelerator & Incubators

2026 EDITION

The Corporate Innovation Operations Playbook

Running challenges and internal accelerators with multi-stakeholder governance

A practical guide for innovation leads coordinating business units, legal, IT, and the C-suite around one program.

The Coordination Problem

Corporate innovation programs fail operationally, not strategically.

The strategy is usually sound. What breaks is the operations: submissions in email, evaluation in a spreadsheet, legal wanting one format, IT another, the business unit tracking its own, and the innovation lead maintaining a master spreadsheet that is always one version behind.

This playbook is about running corporate innovation programs with the governance enterprise requires, without becoming the information relay between every stakeholder.

> ”The innovation lead maintains a master spreadsheet that is always one version behind.”

WHAT THIS COVERS

Challenge design, submission routing, multi-stakeholder evaluation, internal accelerator management, expert coordination, stakeholder permissions, and C-suite reporting. Each section pairs the operating principle with the checklist to put it in place.

HOW TO READ THIS PLAYBOOK

The sections follow the life of a program: design the challenge, route what comes in, evaluate it across stakeholders, run the ventures that result, and report up. Permissions and reuse sit underneath all of it. Read it in order the first time, then keep it as a reference for the part you are building next.

Designing the Challenge

A well-designed challenge attracts relevant submissions and screens out noise.

Most of the work that determines a challenge's success happens before it launches. A precise brief and a structured form do the first round of filtering for you, so your reviewers spend their time on real candidates rather than sorting through everything an open call attracts.

CHALLENGE DESIGN CHECKLIST

- [ ] Write a specific problem statement, not a broad theme
- [ ] Define eligibility clearly (stage, sector, geography, partnership type)
- [ ] Build a structured submission form, not an email address
- [ ] Set automatic eligibility screening on submission
- [ ] Configure business unit routing before launch

> SPECIFICITY IS THE FIRST FILTER
>
> **A vague challenge attracts vague submissions.** Specificity in the brief is the first filter. A problem statement that names the use case, the constraint, and the kind of partner you want does more screening than any rubric applied after the fact.

THE FORM IS THE DATA MODEL

An email inbox gives you PDFs in a dozen formats that someone has to read end to end. A structured form gives you the same fields for every submission, which is what makes automatic screening, routing, and comparison possible later. Decide what every stakeholder will need to evaluate, and ask for exactly that.

Submission Routing

At volume, routing is the difference between a managed pipeline and an overflowing inbox.

Ten submissions can be sorted by hand. Two hundred cannot. Routing rules set up before launch turn the moment of highest volume from a bottleneck into a non-event: each submission lands with the right reviewer the instant it arrives.

ROUTING CHECKLIST

- [ ] Route submissions to the relevant business unit automatically
- [ ] Send flagged submissions (IP, legal) to the right queue
- [ ] Pre-assign reviewers to their category before submissions arrive
- [ ] Watch the pipeline fill without manual sorting

> FROM DISTRIBUTOR TO OVERSEER
>
> **When 200 submissions route themselves to the right reviewer, the innovation lead watches progress instead of distributing batches.** The role shifts from moving work around to managing the program, which is what you were hired to do.

FLAG THE EXCEPTIONS AUTOMATICALLY

Some submissions need legal or IP eyes before anyone else sees them. Building those flags into the routing rules means the sensitive cases go to the right queue without the innovation lead having to spot them and forward them manually, which is exactly the step that gets missed under volume.

Multi-Stakeholder Evaluation

Different stakeholders evaluate different things. Keep them separate.

1. **Program Screening** — Eligibility and completeness
2. **Business Unit Relevance** — Fit with the unit's needs
3. **IP & Legal** — Risk and compliance
4. **Committee** — Final selection

EVALUATION STRUCTURE

- [ ] Configure stages: program screening, business unit relevance, IP and legal, committee
- [ ] Assign each stage to the right reviewers
- [ ] Keep confidentiality between stages with permissions
- [ ] Build the committee shortlist automatically from scores

> START FROM A SHORTLIST
>
> **The committee meeting should start from a shortlist, not a full submission pile.** Each stakeholder reviews their stage independently, and the scores roll up so the committee opens to the candidates that already cleared screening, relevance, and legal.

Internal Accelerators

Internal venture programs need the same structure as external ones.

An intrapreneurship program is easy to treat as a side project run on goodwill. But an internal team building a new venture needs milestones, experts, and reporting just as much as an external startup does, and the program earns its budget by showing that progress to the parent company.

INTERNAL ACCELERATOR CHECKLIST

- [ ] Configure cohort tracks with milestone timelines
- [ ] Give internal teams their own workspace
- [ ] Match internal and external experts to teams
- [ ] Track progress in a dashboard that feeds parent-corporate reporting

> SAME RIGOR, INTERNAL TEAMS
>
> **Intrapreneurship programs benefit from the same milestone tracking and expert coordination as a startup accelerator.** The teams are internal, but the discipline that makes external accelerators work applies just as well to ventures built inside the company.

A WORKSPACE PER TEAM

Internal teams need a place to run their venture that is theirs: their milestones, their documents, their expert sessions. Giving each team a workspace keeps the program organized as it grows and feeds a single dashboard that the parent corporate can read without chasing each team for a status update.

Expert Coordination

Internal experts and external mentors both need structured coordination.

Your experts are giving their time on top of their day jobs. Every manual scheduling email, every double-booking, every session that no one logged spends goodwill you cannot easily replace. Structure is how you protect the people the program depends on.

EXPERT COORDINATION CHECKLIST

- [ ] Build pools of internal domain experts and external mentors
- [ ] Match expertise to challenge teams or internal ventures
- [ ] Let teams book expert sessions directly
- [ ] Log every session and commitment

> STRUCTURE PROTECTS GOODWILL
>
> **Expert goodwill runs out when coordination is manual.** Structure protects your experts' time. Direct booking, expertise matching, and a logged record of every session mean experts spend their time advising rather than untangling calendars.

LET TEAMS BOOK DIRECTLY

When the innovation lead is the calendar, every session waits on one person's inbox. Letting teams book matched experts directly removes that bottleneck and gives you a complete record of who advised whom, so you can see which relationships are active and which experts are carrying too much.

Stakeholder Permissions

Every stakeholder needs a view. None of them should become an admin.

STAKEHOLDER	SEES	ACCESS
Business unit reviewer	Their assigned batch only	SCOPED
Legal & IP	Flagged submissions only	SCOPED
C-suite sponsor	Program dashboard	READ-ONLY
External participant	Their own submission only	SCOPED
Internal champion	Their portfolio	SCOPED

PERMISSION DESIGN

- [ ] Business unit reviewers see their assigned batch only
- [ ] Legal and IP see flagged submissions only
- [ ] C-suite sponsors get a read-only dashboard
- [ ] External participants see their own submission only
- [ ] Internal champions see their portfolio

> ACCESS WITHOUT OVERHEAD
>
> **Role-based permissions let you give every stakeholder the right access without making them an admin and without becoming their information relay.** Everyone sees what they need and nothing they should not, and no one routes information through you.

C-Suite Reporting

The board pack should not take a week to build.

If reporting means a week of reconstructing the program's state from spreadsheets and email threads, the report is stale before it is finished and the innovation lead loses a week they could have spent on the program. The fix is to track the numbers continuously and let the sponsor read them live.

REPORTING CHECKLIST

- [ ] Track pipeline metrics, milestone progress, and outcomes continuously
- [ ] Give the C-suite sponsor a read-only live dashboard
- [ ] Export board-ready summaries without manual reconstruction

> THE SPONSOR STOPS EMAILING YOU
>
> **When the C-suite sponsor has a live read-only dashboard, they stop emailing you for the update.** The answer to "how is the program doing" is a link they can open any time, not a request that interrupts the work it is asking about.

WHAT THE C-SUITE ACTUALLY WATCHES

- Submissions in pipeline
- Conversion through stages
- Active ventures
- Milestone completion rate
- Time from launch to shortlist
- Outcomes by business unit
- Expert sessions delivered

Reuse Across Cycles

Configure once. Reuse every challenge cycle.

The first challenge takes real setup: the form, the routing rules, the rubric, the stakeholder assignments. The point of a platform is that you never build it twice. Each subsequent cycle starts from what you already configured and refines it.

WHAT TO SAVE AND REUSE

- [ ] Save the challenge form, routing rules, and evaluation rubric
- [ ] Save stakeholder assignments and notification templates
- [ ] Clone the configuration for the next cycle

> SETUP COMPOUNDS
>
> **Setup compounds instead of repeating.** The second cycle is faster than the first, the third faster than the second, and the time saved goes back into the program rather than into rebuilding the plumbing.

CLONE, THEN REFINE

Cloning a configuration is a starting point, not a lock-in. You adjust where the last cycle taught you something: a routing rule that misfired, a rubric weight that was off, a notification that landed late. Because you are editing rather than starting over, every challenge runs a little better than the one before.

About AcceleratorApp

AcceleratorApp is a program management platform trusted by 200+ organizations across 6 continents, including German Accelerator and Conception X.

It runs corporate innovation programs with multi-stakeholder governance: challenge intake, routing, multi-stage evaluation, internal accelerators, expert coordination, AI application scoring, AI applicant coaching, AI reporting, and C-suite dashboards.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ISO 27001 certified
- GDPR compliant
- White-label
- Granular RBAC
- Live in 1 to 2 weeks
- Full migration included
- Plans from $499 per month

GET STARTED

Book a demo: acceleratorapp.co/en/demo

See pricing: acceleratorapp.co/en/pricing

Contact: support@acceleratorapp.co

ONE PLATFORM, EVERY STAKEHOLDER

- Challenge intake with structured forms and eligibility screening
- Automatic routing to business units and flagged queues
- Multi-stage evaluation with stage-level confidentiality
- Internal accelerator tracks with milestone tracking
- Expert coordination with direct booking and session logs
- Granular role-based permissions per stakeholder
- AI application scoring, applicant coaching, and reporting
- Live read-only C-suite dashboards

> From challenge launch to C-suite report, every stakeholder works in one system, so the innovation lead manages the program instead of relaying information between spreadsheets.

AcceleratorApp
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Ready to run your innovation programs on one platform?

A 30-minute demo tailored to your challenge structure, stakeholder governance, and reporting needs.

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