EIC COMMUNITIES

MATCHMAKING IN DEEP-TECH

WHY IT WORKS AND HOW TO REPLICATE IT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE EIC COMMUNITIES PROJECT

cross Europe, the landscape of deep-tech innovation has grown in complexity and ambition. New technologies emerge from multidisciplinary research environments where scientific, industrial and societal expectations converge. In this scenario, the EIC Communities project represented a deliberate attempt to create a **collaborative fabric capable of sustaining these innovations through their evolution**. It brought together an exceptionally diverse range of actors - research laboratories, early-stage startups, mature SMEs, industrial leaders, investors, clinicians and policy representatives - under a single umbrella designed to promote structured and meaningful interactions. Unlike ad-hoc networks that come together briefly and then disperse, the EIC Communities were conceived as a **collaborative ecosystem grounded in thematic areas of strategic European importance**. Each Community of Practice – composed by EIC funded projects and

stakeholders - developed its own rhythm of activities, its own internal dynamics and its own culture of dialogue. Yet all three - **Industry, Cleantech and Health** - shared a common purpose: helping participants see beyond their immediate environments and discover the opportunities and perspectives offered by others working at the cutting edge of innovation.

The DEEPSYNC.eu platform gave this community a digital home. It served as a dynamic archive, a meeting point, a space for events, a communication channel and a tool for tracking collaboration. Through DEEPSYNC, innovators could make their work visible, connect with stakeholders, and follow ongoing discussions. The platform complemented the human dimension of the Communities, allowing interactions to continue long after events ended and helping participants build a sense of continuity over months and years.

WHY MATCHMAKING MATTERS: CONNECTING INNOVATORS, INVESTORS, CORPORATES, AND RESEARCHERS

Within this architecture, **matchmaking quickly emerged as one of the strongest catalysts for progress.** It provided an organised way to bring together people whose paths might never cross otherwise. Many innovators enter the deep-tech journey with a strong scientific foundation but limited access to industrial infrastructures, potential buyers, regulatory expertise or investment networks. At the same time, corporates often struggle to navigate Europe's fragmented innovation environment and to identify solutions that genuinely match their strategic needs. Investors too face difficulties in gaining visibility on early-stage technologies that require longer timelines and higher technological readiness before becoming marketable.

Matchmaking addressed these asymmetries in a simple yet powerful way. It created an environment where innovators could present their technologies clearly and where stakeholders could ask targeted questions. These conversations were not theoretical debates but practical exchanges oriented toward feasibility, traction, potential collaborations or investment interest. A single encounter could reshape a project's trajectory, spark a new research direction or reveal an industrial application the team had not previously considered.Over time, matchmaking activities became a central pillar of the EIC Communities because it embodied what the initiative aimed to achieve: connections

grounded in substance, dialogue grounded in shared needs and collaborations grounded in real opportunities. It allowed the ecosystem to move beyond the traditional boundaries of sectors and disciplines, building a collective intelligence capable of addressing Europe's deep-tech challenges.

This document was created with a specific purpose: to **capture the experience gained through the EIC Communities** and transform it into a coherent narrative accessible to organisations that wish to replicate or adapt these approaches. The intention is not to provide a rigid methodology but to translate the lived experience of dozens of events, hundreds of participants, and countless interactions into insights that others can use.

The document describes what makes matchmaking effective in the context of deep-tech innovation, how it connects with the broader mission of the EIC, and why it supports community building. It examines a concrete case study to illustrate how structured matchmaking unfolds in practice, and it reflects on the principles that repeatedly contributed to successful outcomes. Each section builds upon the previous one, showing how different elements - digital tools, preparation, moderation, follow-up, communication and trust - interact to create a meaningful collaboration environment.
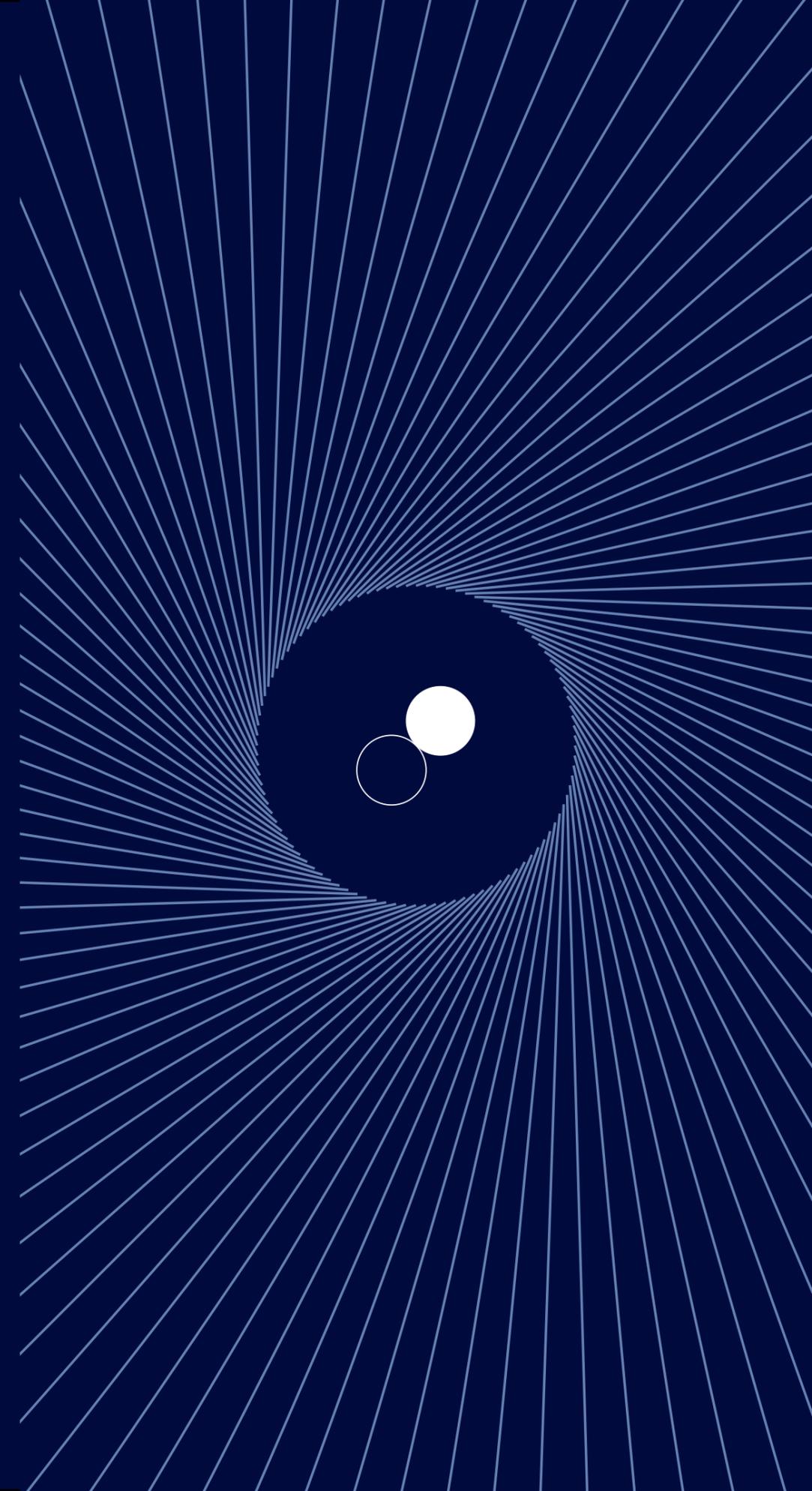
WHAT IS A BEST PRACTICE ON MATCHMAKING?

Within the EIC's vision, community building is not just an organisational goal but a strategic necessity. Deep-tech innovation depends on the ability to bring together scientific talent, industrial capacity, entrepreneurial initiative and financial support. Matchmaking contributes to this mission by creating structured opportunities for the exchange of knowledge, experiences and expectations. In the Communities of Practice, this exchange often revealed complementarities that participants had not considered before. Researchers encountered industrial partners capable of scaling their prototypes. Startups discovered investors interested in technologies typically considered too early. Corporates recognised potential collaborators who could help them tackle emerging challenges. These discoveries did not arise by chance; they emerged because the environment was designed to reveal connections.

A best practice in matchmaking is therefore one that consistently creates these conditions: an atmosphere where participants feel encouraged to express their needs, where questions spark reflection rather than tension, and where dialogue remains open enough to allow unexpected synergies to emerge. The value of these practices lies in their ability to transform individual projects into parts of a larger, interconnected ecosystem.

While data quantified participation, the real understanding emerged through conversations, narratives and the collective memory of the Communities. What follows is an interpretation of that experience aimed at supporting future initiatives.

METHODOLOGY USED TO COLLECT AND ANALYSE CASES

TOOL	BENEFIT
MODERATORS AND FACILITATORS	Engaged closely with participants and collected feedback during and after events.
PLATFORM ANALYTICS	Offered insights into how participants discovered each other, how often profiles were visited, and how frequently messages were exchanged
SURVEYS	Added another layer of perspective y capturing subjective impressions, levels of satisfaction, and perceptions of relevance
PROJECT REPORTS AND INTERACTION LOGS	Helped reconstruct how exchanges developed after initial encounters. The methodology was therefore based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative elements.
INNOVATION INTERMEDIARIES (CLUSTERS, INCUBATORS, TTOS)	Facilitate connections between actors, provide mentoring and business support services, help navigate regulatory or market landscapes, and promote knowledge exchange and ecosystem cohesion.
POLICY ACTORS AND EIC PROGRAMME MANAGERS	Provide strategic oversight, align matchmaking with policy priorities and funding programs, foster cross-sector collaboration, and help ensure that ecosystem growth is sustainable and inclusive.

UNDERSTANDING MATCHMAKING IN THE EIC CONTEXT

EEPSYNC played a fundamental role in shaping how matchmaking unfolded. It provided a space where all projects, stakeholders and interactions could be centralised, preventing the fragmentation that often hinders collaboration across Europe's innovation landscape. For many participants, the platform was their first point of contact with other projects in the Community. It allowed them to explore profiles at their own pace, revisit information and prepare for interactions.

During the events, the platform acted as a bridge between the digital and the human dimensions of collaboration. After events, it remained a repository where notes, presentations and discussions could be accessed, giving continuity to the interactions. This extended life made matchmaking a continuous process rather than a one-time moment. Participants returned to the platform days or weeks after sessions to follow up with new messages, arrange meetings or refine their understanding of potential partners.

KEY ACTORS	THEMATIC	INVESTMENT-FOCUSED	PEER-TO-PEER	CROSS-SECTORAL
STARTUPS & INNOVATORS	● Core participants: present technologies, compare approaches, explore use cases	● Pitch for funding, discuss business models, market entry	● Exchange methods, share lessons, explore joint dev	● Explore new application domains, adapt tech to new sectors
CORPORATES	● Scout domain-specific solutions, discuss technical fit	● Assess investment, partnerships, acquisitions	● Compare approaches with other industry players	● Bridge tech from one sector to another (e.g. health ↔ industry)
INVESTORS	○ Observe tech trends and maturity	● Core actors: evaluate risk, scalability, market readiness	○ Limited role	● Spot cross-sector opportunities and new markets
UNIVERSITIES & RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS	● Core actors: scientific depth, validation, research pathways	○ Occasionally (spin-offs, TRL discussions)	● Core actors: joint research, shared methods	● Translate research across domains
INNOVATION INTERMEDIARIES (CLUSTERS, INCUBATORS, TTOS)	● Curate themes, connect relevant players	● Support investment readiness, deal flow	● Facilitate collaborations between projects	● Orchestrate ecosystem-level connections
POLICY ACTORS & EIC PROGRAMME MANAGERS	● Align themes with policy priorities	○ Strategic oversight (not deal-level)	○ Strategic ecosystem view	● Core actors: enable cross-sector bridges, policy alignment

Legend: ● = Core role   ○ = Supporting / enabling role

CASE STUDY

THE CASE STUDY: MATCHMAKING IN PRACTICE

The case study presented here focuses on the Pitching Sessions conducted in two different editions — 2024 and 2025 - within the three Communities of Practice. These sessions were designed to combine visibility with substance. Projects had the opportunity to present their work while stakeholders could listen, question and engage directly.

The format was intentionally compact, ensuring that each presentation remained clear and dynamic, while the subsequent discussions added nuance and depth. The profiles of participants and their contributions can be summarized in the table on the right.

CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

The sessions emerged in response to a crucial need: the desire to reduce fragmentation and help innovators meet stakeholders capable of supporting their development. Many project teams had strong scientific foundations but lacked structured opportunities to enter into contact with corporates, investors or clinical partners.

Simultaneously, these stakeholders were seeking reliable ways to identify technologies aligned with their priorities. The sessions aimed to shorten this distance, offering a structured encounter that maximised the

KEY ACTORS INVOLVED

TYPE	ADDED VALUE	BENEFITS
VENTURE CAPITAL FIRMS AND INVESTMENT FUNDS	Offer not only financial resources but also strategic guidance, mentoring, market intelligence, and connections to broader investment networks. They help projects understand investor expectations and funding pathways.	Enable projects to secure capital for scaling, refine business models for market fit, gain credibility with other investors, and accelerate growth by leveraging investor expertise and networks.
CORPORATE R&D UNITS	Provide deep industry knowledge, technical expertise, access to industrial facilities, and collaboration opportunities for joint development and co-creation.	Support technology integration into existing processes, validate solutions at industrial scale, facilitate pilot projects, and create pathways for long-term partnerships and commercialisation.
SMES WITH COMPLEMENTARY TECHNOLOGIES	Bring specialized skills, niche technologies, and agile innovation capabilities, offering opportunities for co-development and knowledge sharing.	Facilitate collaborative innovation, enhance product or solution capabilities, enable access to new markets, and strengthen the overall ecosystem through partnerships and joint initiatives.
NATIONAL AND REGIONAL INNOVATION AGENCIES	Offer strategic support in the form of policy guidance, access to public funding, regulatory advice, and connections within regional and national innovation ecosystems.	Help navigate complex regulatory and funding landscapes, provide access to grants or support programs, foster collaborations with other innovators, and strengthen regional innovation capacities.
UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH CENTRES	Contribute advanced scientific expertise, research infrastructure, laboratories, and access to academic knowledge networks.	Enable rigorous technology validation, support early-stage development, provide evidence-based insights, facilitate research collaboration, and enhance credibility of innovative solutions.
CLINICAL PARTNERS	Provide access to patient populations, real-world clinical settings, domain-specific expertise, and validation opportunities in health and life sciences.	Support clinical testing, generate necessary evidence for regulatory compliance, validate safety and efficacy, and accelerate the adoption of medical technologies in practice.
TECHNOLOGY SCOUTS AND INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATIONS	Monitor emerging trends, identify high-potential innovations, provide market insights, and connect stakeholders with complementary interests.	Facilitate strategic matchmaking, increase visibility for projects, identify potential partnerships or commercial opportunities, and support informed decision-making for technology adoption and collaboration.

chances of finding meaningful matches.
Stakeholders were carefully targeted and invited to join based on their alignment with the thematic focus. Their diversity added richness to the discussions and increased the likelihood of meaningful follow-ups.

The matchmaking process within the EIC Communities project was carefully designed to ensure that interactions were meaningful, targeted, and capable of leading to tangible outcomes.
It unfolded in four interconnected phases, each building upon the previous to create a seamless journey from preparation to actionable follow-up.

The outcomes of these activities were multifaceted.
Participation remained consistently high across all sessions, demonstrating the relevance of the format for both innovators and stakeholders. More importantly, **interactions were perceived as meaningful**. Many participants reported leaving the sessions with new insights into their technologies,

clearer expectations about market potential and a stronger sense of the ecosystem surrounding them.

Several collaborations began to take shape after the events. Some projects initiated discussions with industrial partners. Several participants expressed interest in exploring joint funding opportunities or potential pilot implementations. These outcomes showed that matchmaking had become more than an exchange of information: it helped generate concrete steps towards cooperation.
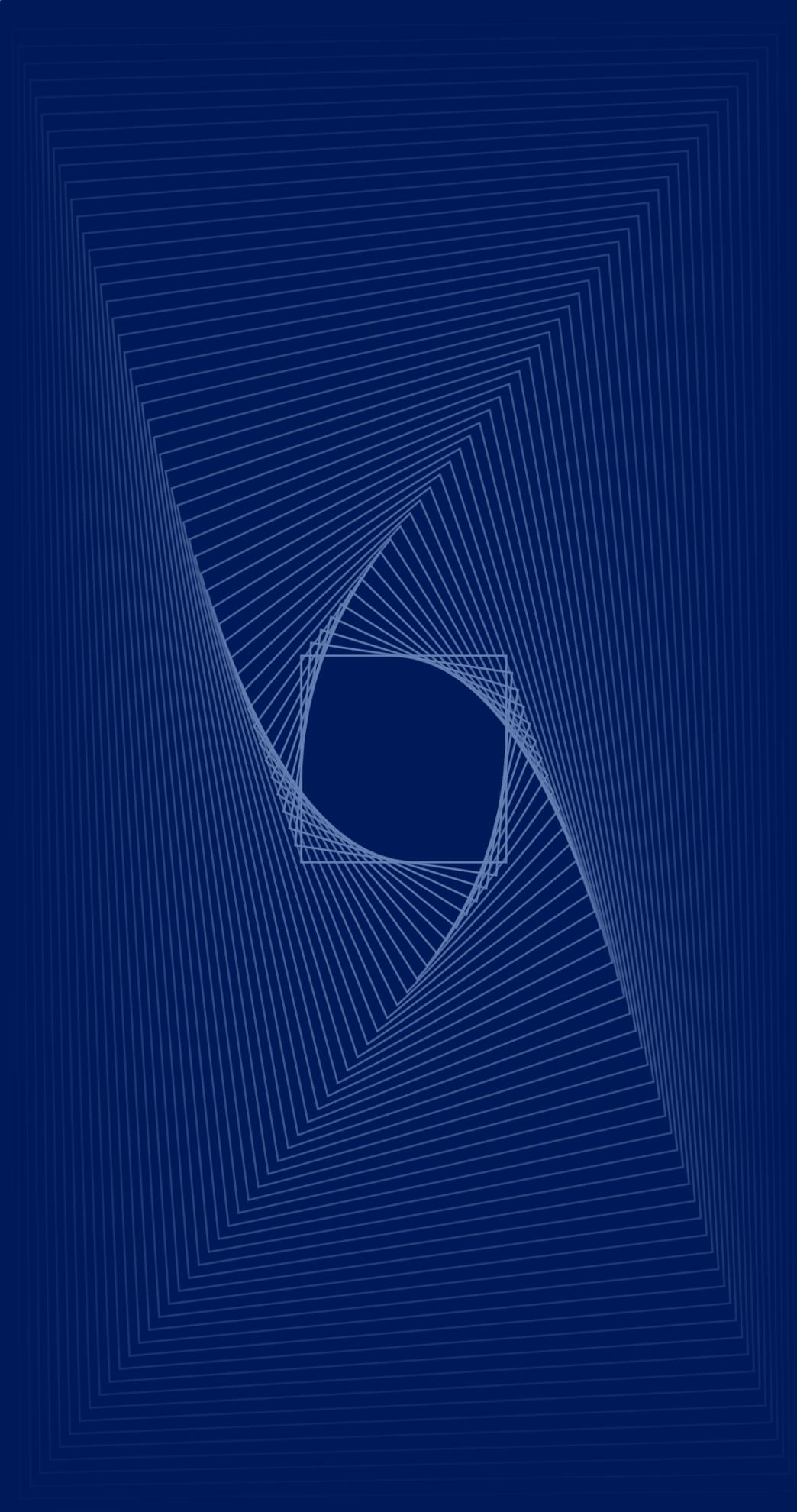
PROCESS AND TOOLS USED IN MATCHMAKING

1. PREPARATION

EIC projects were provided with intensive guidance to craft concise and compelling pitches that highlighted their value proposition, technological readiness, and specific collaboration needs. Dedicated preparatory sessions offered an opportunity to refine messaging, anticipate potential stakeholder questions, and simulate real event dynamics. These preparations helped ensure that each pitch was polished, strategic, and able to capture attention within a short time frame.

OBJECTIVES	Refine pitches and messaging
KEY TOOLS & FEATURES	Coaching sessions, pitch templates, DEEPSYNC pre-event profiles
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	Clear, compelling presentations; anticipatory responses to stakeholder queries

2. STAKEHOLDER SELECTION

Using the DEEPSYNC platform, stakeholders could access detailed project profiles, including technical specifications, market potential, and collaboration objectives. This allowed them to select projects of particular interest, ensuring that engagement was driven by genuine alignment rather than random participation. By empowering stakeholders to self-select, the process increased motivation, focus, and the likelihood of productive interactions.

OBJECTIVES	Target aligned engagement
KEY TOOLS & FEATURES	DEEPSYNC project profiles, selection interface
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	Motivated, interest-based participation; optimized match quality

3. PITCHING AND Q&A

At the heart of the sessions were the pitches themselves, typically lasting 5–7 minutes, each immediately followed by an interactive Q&A. This format encouraged dynamic exchanges, with moderators facilitating targeted questions, maintaining balance, and drawing out critical insights. Stakeholders were able to probe technical details, explore commercial potential, and provide immediate feedback, while innovators gained real-time validation and strategic guidance.

OBJECTIVES	Present innovations and gather feedback
KEY TOOLS & FEATURES	Short pitches, interactive Q&A, moderation
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	Immediate validation, constructive feedback, strategic insights

4. BILATERAL MEETINGS

After the plenary sessions, bilateral meetings offered a confidential space for deeper discussions. These meetings often included technical deep dives, negotiations regarding intellectual property considerations, exploration of pilot opportunities, and preliminary discussions on funding or partnership terms. The structured yet flexible nature of these meetings helped translate initial interest into concrete collaborative actions. In some cases, bilateral sessions were organized instead of the plenary pitching because of unavailability of some partners.

OBJECTIVES	Potential partnerships, pilot projects, investment discussions, IP agreements
KEY TOOLS & FEATURES	Deep-dive collaboration discussions
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	Private meeting rooms, follow-up scheduling, secure information exchange

KEY BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

ne of the clearest findings from the sessions was that matchmaking must be structured yet flexible. It requires a rhythm that supports the evolution of conversations. Preparation helps presenters articulate their ideas clearly. The pitching moment provides visibility. The bilateral meetings transform interest into possibility. Follow-up communication keeps the dialogue alive. When these phases align smoothly, matchmaking becomes a continuous journey rather than a single moment of contact.

Fostering trust and reciprocity among participants: Trust proved essential in helping participants share openly. Stakeholders appreciated having a role in selecting the projects they engaged with, while innovators valued knowing that the people attending their pitches were genuinely interested. Moderation is crucial to mantain this climate of trust. Sessions were conducted with respect, clarity and transparency. Private discussion spaces strengthened this environment by allowing sensitive matters - such as intellectual property or regulatory constraints - to be discussed more freely.

Leveraging digital tools (e.g. DEEPSYNC features): The digital dimension of DEEPSYNC amplified the effectiveness of the matchmaking process. It offered a stable space where participants could prepare before events and reconnect afterwards. Because information remained visible over time, stakeholders could revisit profiles and follow the evolution of a project, giving matchmaking a depth that extended far beyond the live sessions.

Integrating matchmaking within broader communication and dissemination actions: Communication surrounded every event. Announcements raised awareness. Timely updates kept interest alive. Post-event summaries reinforced the value of participation and provided a shared memory of the main outcomes. This communication cycle made matchmaking feel part of a coherent narrative, strengthening both engagement and continuity.

Ensuring inclusivity and diversity in participation: The diversity of participants emerged as a powerful factor of success. Projects differed in maturity, geographical origin and technological focus. Stakeholders varied widely in their expertise. This diversity broadened the scope of discussions and opened unexpected avenues for collaboration. It allowed innovators to receive feedback from perspectives they had not anticipated, enriching their understanding of their own work.

REPLICATION

THE MATCHMAKING FRAMEWORK FOR REPLICATION

The experience gained through the EIC Communities helped crystallise a framework that begins with preparation, reaches its core during the live encounters and extends into structured follow-up. Each phase supports the next, creating a cycle that encourages connections to deepen naturally over time. Preparation gives clarity and direction. Execution brings people together and allows ideas to be shared. Follow-up provides the time and space necessary to transform initial interest into genuine collaboration.

Replication criteria and scalability potential: For matchmaking to be replicated and scaled, it must remain flexible enough to adapt to diverse contexts but structured enough to maintain quality. A clear thematic focus helps participants understand the purpose of the session. Skilled facilitation ensures that discussions remain constructive. A digital environment supports continuity. These elements create a foundation upon which different regions, sectors or projects can build their own versions of the matchmaking process.

Monitoring and evaluation indicators (KPIs, qualitative metrics, engagement data): Effective monitoring and evaluation are essential to understand the impact of matchmaking activities and to continuously improve them. Indicators can be both quantitative and qualitative, and digital tools like DEEPSYNC provide valuable data for tracking engagement and outcomes. On the right there is a summary table illustrating Key Performance Indicators (KPI), what they measure, and how they can be monitored.

Challenges and mitigation strategies: Challenges inevitably arise. Expectations may differ between innovators and stakeholders. Time constraints may limit interactions. Sometimes a conversation does not lead where participants hope. The experience of the Communities showed that thoughtful facilitation, transparency and adequate preparation can prevent most challenges from becoming barriers.

EVALUATION INDICATORS

KPI	WHAT IT MEASURES	HOW IT IS MONITORED
Number of participants	Reach and engagement of stakeholders	Event registrations, attendance logs, platform analytics
Number of pitches delivered	Level of project participation and visibility	Session records, video logs, presentation tracking
Follow-up meetings	Conversion of initial interactions into concrete engagements	Meeting schedules, DEEPSYNC bilateral meeting logs, email confirmations
Stakeholder satisfaction	Quality of interactions and perceived value	Post-event surveys, interviews, feedback forms
Relevance of interactions	Alignment of stakeholder needs and project offerings	Survey questions, qualitative interviews, feedback during sessions
Collaboration outcomes	Tangible results from matchmaking (partnerships, pilots, investment interest)	Tracking pilot projects, partnership agreements, funding follow-ups
Platform engagement	Use of digital tools to explore projects and interact	DEEPSYNC metrics (profile views, messaging activity, session participation)

SUCCESSFUL MATCHMAKING FORMATS

Portfolio days: Portfolio-oriented events provided a broad view of technological developments within the Communities. They allowed stakeholders to explore a wide range of solutions and often sparked interest in projects that had not initially been on their radar.

Thematic deep tech sessions (Industry, Cleantech, Health): More focused sessions invited participants to concentrate on specific technological challenges. These events produced conversations that were deeper and more aligned with the needs of the participants. They also highlighted the complexity of innovation within each thematic area.

Cross-community events and eic-eit synergies: Cross-community activities demonstrated how much potential lies in connecting different thematic areas. Solutions developed for industrial challenges occasionally found relevance in healthcare or in environmental applications. These encounters expanded the horizon of innovation for many participants.

Online vs. in-person matchmaking: comparative insights: Online sessions proved highly accessible and allowed participants to join from across Europe without logistical complications. They made preparation more structured, as DEEPSYNC served as a shared digital environment for profiles and materials. In-person meetings, however, facilitated a form of dialogue that relies on body language, spontaneous reactions and a sense of human presence. Combining both approaches produced the most balanced and impactful outcomes.
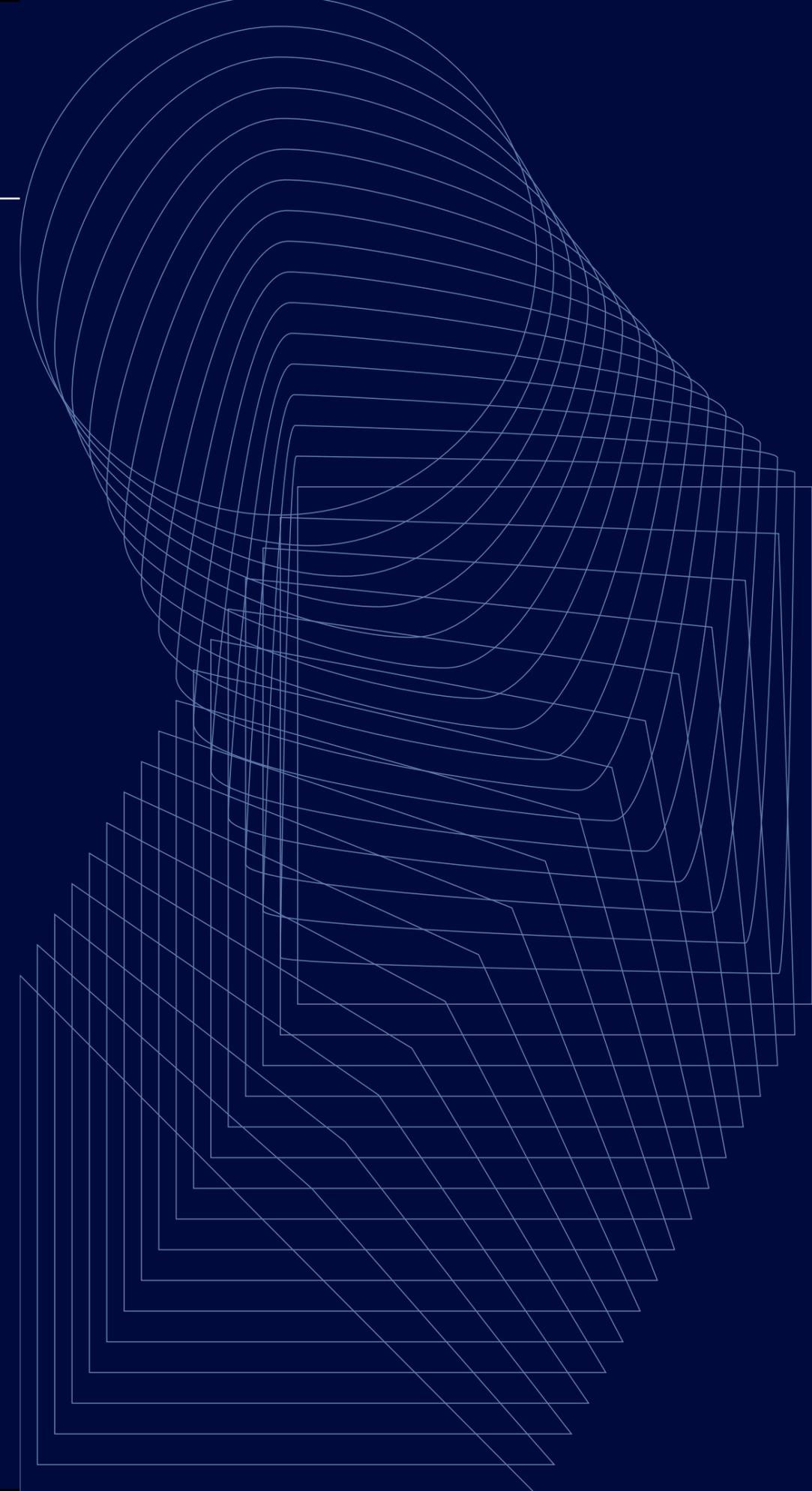
POLICY AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

For matchmaking to play a long-term role in European innovation, it must be anchored within regional, national and European strategies. When matchmaking becomes a recognised practice within research and innovation frameworks, it supports a more coordinated and sustainable ecosystem. The experiences of the EIC Communities show that matchmaking works best when it is not an isolated event but a recurring element within broader programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECTS, CLUSTERS, AND INNOVATION HUBS

Innovation intermediaries such as clusters, hubs and project consortia can play a decisive role in enhancing matchmaking. When they support their members in articulating their needs, preparing their stories and following up after events, they reinforce the effectiveness of each session. Over time, this creates a culture in which collaboration becomes a natural part of the innovation process.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE MATCHMAKING BEYOND PROJECT DURATION

Sustaining matchmaking beyond the lifetime of a project requires a combination of platform continuity, stakeholder engagement and community culture. Digital tools can maintain visibility, but the willingness of participants to keep interacting gives matchmaking its true longevity. When relations built during a project continue to grow after its formal end, the ecosystem becomes more resilient and capable of adapting to future challenges.
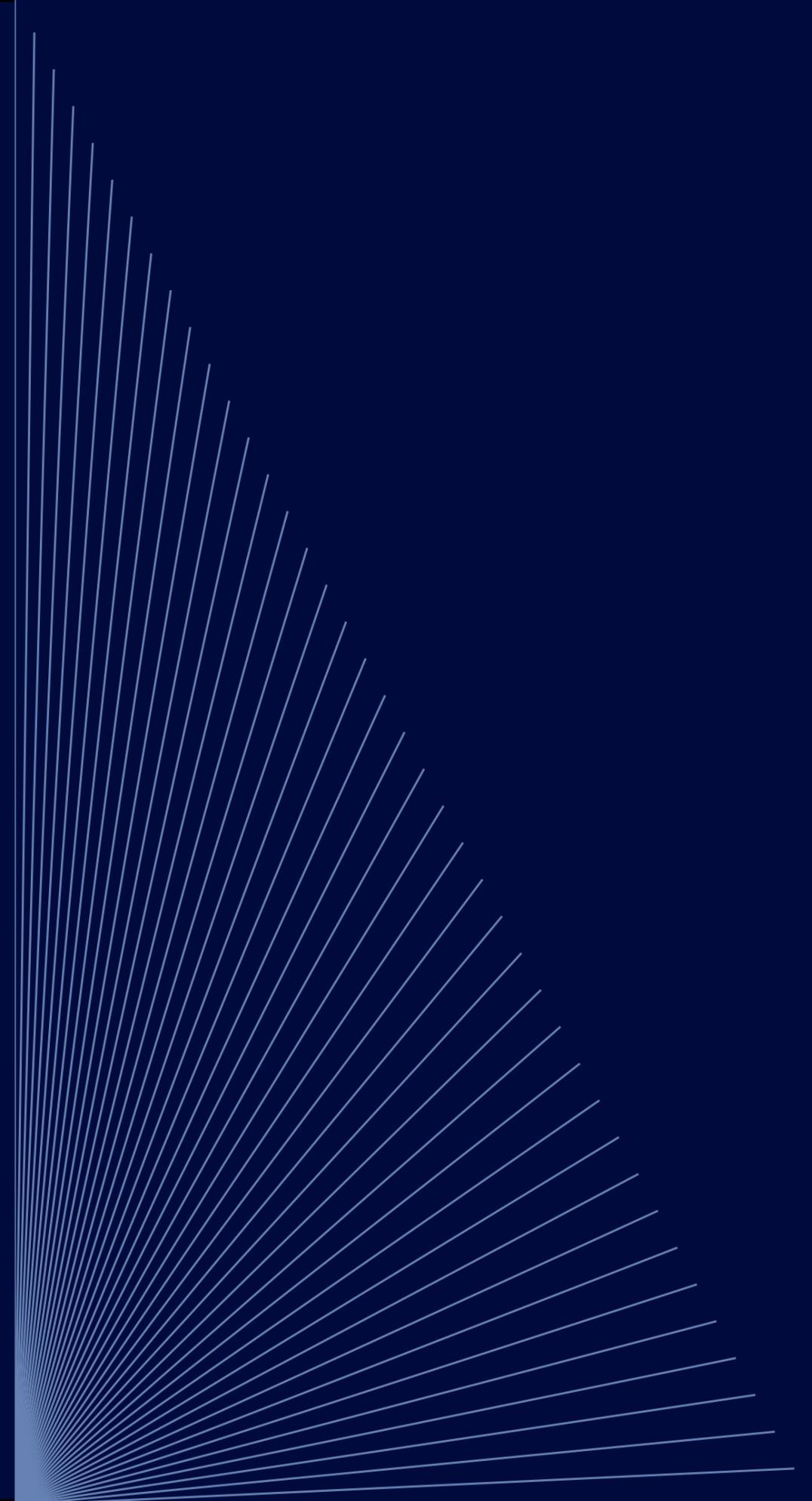
CONCLUSIONS

Matchmaking has proven itself to be a central driver of collaboration within the EIC Communities. It has brought together actors who might never have met otherwise and facilitated exchanges that reshaped technologies, strategies and expectations. It has allowed participants to recognise their place within a larger ecosystem and to understand the shared mission that connects their efforts.

The next phase of the EIC Communities will build upon these experiences. New tools, refined formats and increased cross-community interaction will strengthen the matchmaking ecosystem. The lessons learned will inform future sessions, making them even more accessible, impactful and aligned with the evolving needs of European innovators.

The practices developed within the EIC Communities demonstrate that **effective matchmaking is both replicable and adaptable.** When structured with clarity, supported by digital tools and anchored in a culture of trust, matchmaking becomes an instrument capable of transforming European innovation. It reveals the power of purposeful encounters and shows how much can be achieved when people come together with openness, curiosity and a shared commitment to progress.

EIC COMMUNITIES

MATCHMAKING IN DEEP-TECH