



## Rules & Regulations: SCALE UP NOW 2026

### PREAMBLE

SCALE UP NOW is a one-week internationalization training program organized by Startup Portugal and Plug and Play aiming to prepare the Portuguese ecosystem – startups, scaleups, incubators, accelerators, investors and innovation-driven companies – for successful expansion into the United States (U.S.). Taking place in Lisbon from January 19 until January 23, the program offers a dynamic mix of expert-led panels, practical workshops, and strategic mentoring focused on key areas such as U.S. market entry, legal frameworks, and business culture. Tailored for the startup experiences in the internationalization process, the incubators, accelerators, corporates, and investors interested in global innovation, the program provides not only valuable insights and know-how but also strategic connections to support startup expansion into the U.S..

This Regulation defines the selection procedures and participation conditions for startups and other entities in the *Scale Up Now*, a special program that offers national entities and startups the opportunity to better expand their businesses to the U.S. market.

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## CHAPTER 1 – General Provisions

### Article 1 – Scope

These Regulation establish the selection procedures and participation conditions for startups in the *Scale Up Now* initiative.

## **Article 2 – Objective of the Initiative**

1. The *Scale Up Now* initiative aims to support the expansion efforts of Portuguese entities helping the startups that have already developed a differentiated product or service and seek to enter the U.S. market.
2. This initiative aims to deepen the connection between the Portuguese innovation ecosystem and key stakeholders in the U.S. entrepreneurial and investment landscape, while promoting the global integration of Portuguese startups by preparing them to compete and grow in highly competitive markets.
3. The initiative is open to startups, scaleups, incubators, accelerators, investors, and other key players from any sector, all seeking to better understand how to support expansion into the U.S. market.

## **Article 3 – Organizers**

The organizing entities of the *Scale Up Now* initiative are:

- a) **Startup Portugal** – Associação Portuguesa para a Promoção do Empreendedorismo – SPAPPE, headquartered at Rua de Salazares, 842, 4100-442 Porto.
- b) **PLUG & PLAY L.L.C.**, headquartered at 440 North Wolfe Road, Sunnyvale, CA 94085, United States of America.

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## **CHAPTER 2 – Program**

### **Article 4 – Program**

1. The *Scale Up Now* initiative is a 5-day program structured into 2 days for incubators, corporates and investors, 2 days dedicated to startups, and a final Demo Day.
2. The event will take place at Pavilhão de Portugal, Startup Portugal's headquarters in Lisbon, from January 19–23, with free participation.
3. Throughout the duration of the program, the jury will select 12 startups, in accordance with the present Regulation, to participate in the final session ("Demo Day"), during which they will pitch before a panel of U.S. experts. Based on such presentations, the panel shall determine the 5 most

promising startups to be awarded participation in a soft-landing program aimed at supporting their business expansion into the United States.

## **Article 5 – Jury**

1. The *Scale Up Now* Jury will consist of two permanent members:
  - a. One representative from Plug and Play (Jury President);
  - b. One representative invited by the Plug and Play;
  - c. One representative from Startup Portugal;
2. Each entity may appoint an alternate member.
3. The Jury deliberates independently and makes final decisions by a majority vote.
4. The Jury may consult recognized experts during the analysis process.
5. Jury members cannot apply to the initiative. If a Jury member has a direct or indirect interest in a candidate project, they must abstain from evaluation and voting.

## **Article 6 – Eligibility**

1. To be eligible to attend and be selected to pitch at the *Scaleup Up Now* initiative, startups must be:
  - a) Based in Portugal with high-growth potential, focusing on innovative products or services.
  - b) Legal entities officially recognized as a startup or scaleup under Law No. 21/2023, of May 25.
2. Exclusions apply to legal entities associated with the organizing entities and partners, as well as those whose shareholders are members or employees of these entities and partners.
3. In addition to the criteria set out in the previous paragraphs, Startups selected to pitch at the Demo Day must participate in at least 50% of the 2 days activities for startups preceding the event.

## **Article 7 – Project Types**

1. Eligible projects must either introduce a new product or service or present a new application of an existing product or service.
2. There are no thematic or industry restrictions.

## **Article 8 – Registration Process**

1. Registration for the *Scale Up Now* initiative is free, and it must be formalized through a designated form available at the following electronic address: <https://form.typeform.com/to/wBk1VRNz>.

2. The registration process for startups consists of a duly completed form, including data about your business and strategy, along with a project presentation document, in the case of startup registration.
3. By submitting their registration, candidates assume all responsibilities arising from their participation.
4. To complete the registration process, applicants must declare that they accept the provisions of this Regulation, as well as provide their consent for the processing of personal data, for the purpose of ensuring their participation in and management of the event.

## **Article 9 – Registration Deadline**

Registration must be submitted by 11:59 PM on January 7, 2026.

## **Article 10 – Demo Day Selection Process for Startups**

1. The Demo Day participant projects will be evaluated by the Jury referred to in Article 4 of this Regulation during the Demo Day.
2. A total of twelve startups will be selected to pitch their solutions. Of these, five will be awarded the prizes outlined in Article 11.2, based on the following criteria:
  - a) 25% – Product: Assesses the readiness, maturity, and competitiveness of the startup's product or solution. This includes its level of technological development, product-market fit and differentiation from competitors;
  - b) 25% – Business: Evaluates the startup's traction, scalability, and financial maturity, including revenue, business model strength, international potential, and investment raised. Reflects commercial validation and growth potential;
  - c) 25% – Team: Analyzes the team's composition, diversity of skills, founders' backgrounds, and the level of international engagement or readiness to expand to markets like the U.S.;
  - d) 25% – Collaboration Potential: Assesses the startup's potential benefits from participating in the program, including business growth, technological advancement, and networking opportunities, while also evaluating the feasibility of implementing a U.S. pilot, taking into account technical, operational, and regulatory considerations.
3. The Jury's decisions are made by the majority vote of its members and are final, with no possibility of appeal. If any of the selected startups fail to confirm their participation within the requested deadline, the next highest-ranked startup will be selected to take its place and benefit from all the opportunities granted to the withdrawn startup.

4. The Jury reserves the right not to award the prizes stipulated in Article 11 of this Regulation if it determines that the startups do not meet the announced criteria.
5. The Jury reserves the right to disqualify startups that do not comply with the eligibility criteria set forth in Article 6 at any time during the initiative.

## **Article 11 – Benefits**

1. This program aims to provide participants with the following benefits:
  - a) Access to essential knowledge about the North American market: regulations, business culture, and market entry strategies;
  - b) Direct contact with U.S. stakeholders: investors, experts, and potential partners;
  - c) Hands-on learning based on real-world challenges and specialized feedback.
2. The 5 startups with the highest score mentioned in the Article 10 will gain direct and free access to the Plug and Play acceleration program (GOAL program), including the development of a pilot in the U.S. with American companies and tickets to the Silicon Valley Summit, United States.
  - a) The program will run from April 13th to May 22nd and each startup may have up to two representatives participating in the program.
  - b) Participants will join a mixed cohort of international founders, including entrepreneurs flying in from Canada, Lithuania, Albania, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, and more, providing excellent opportunities for networking, collaboration, and cross-cultural learning.
  - c) The program will focus on Silicon Valley best practices and cover topics such as working with large corporations, learning from founders who have both failed and succeeded raising hundreds of millions of dollars, expanding into the U.S. market, identifying investor red flags, and meeting with Plug and Play CEO, Saeed Amidi.
  - d) Participants will also be evaluated by Plug and Play Silicon Valley Ventures team.
  - e) The agenda is designed to combine interactive sessions with opportunities for participants to fully benefit from office hours, unlimited mentorship, co-working spaces, event participation, and field trips.

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## **CHAPTER 4 – FINAL PROVISIONS**

### **Article 12 – Confidentiality**

The organizers guarantee confidentiality of submitted registrations and personal data, in compliance with Startup Portugal's Privacy Policy.

## **Article 13 – Amendments**

The organizers reserve the right to amend this Regulation at any time. Changes will be communicated via the official platforms where the Regulation are available.

## **Article 14 – Final Provisions**

1. For any omitted provisions, the Jury President will determine the applicable solution.
2. For further inquiries, contact [scaleupnow@startuptoolsugal.com](mailto:scaleupnow@startuptoolsugal.com).