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Foster a place-based innovation culture in Widening countries

# INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE HUBS WEEK 2026

## Info Day

23 October 2026

on-line: MS Teams

***Coffee break.***
***We are back at 11:15 CET!***

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# The Research Component: Conditions, Pitfalls, and Winning Strategies

A structural playbook for designing the R&I anchor within International Excellence Hubs.

Excellence Hubs Info Day | Friday, 23 October 2026

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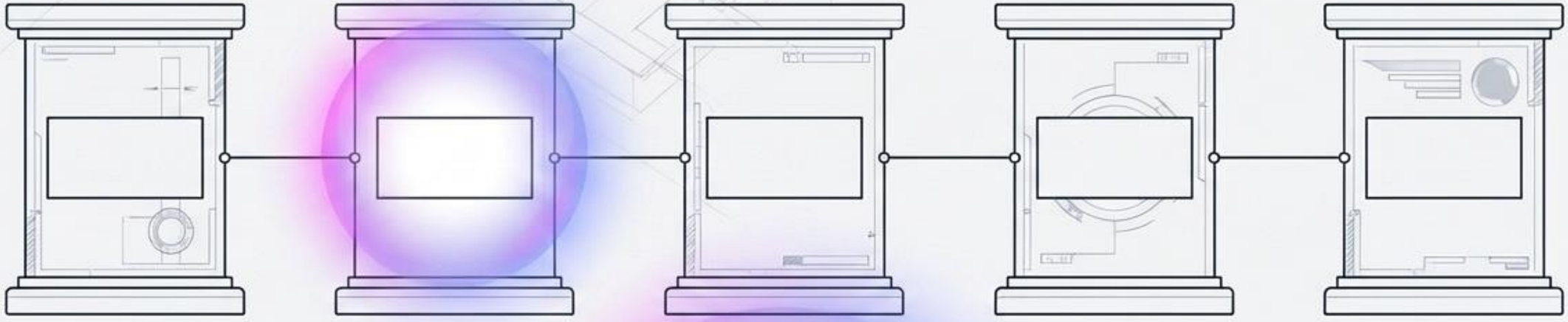
# A hub without a strong research component becomes a mere networking project.

# A hub with excellent research becomes a sustainable ecosystem.

- Generates scientific excellence and novel knowledge.
- Enables long-term, structural international partnerships.
- Attracts talent and leverages private investment.
- Builds the ultimate credibility of the Hub.

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# The Engine of the 5 Pillars



**Pillar I**
(Joint R&I Strategy aligned with RIS3)

**Pillar II**
(The R&I Component). Closes knowledge gaps and develops science with true market potential.

**Pillar III** (Investment Plans for commercial viability)

**Pillar IV** (Conceptual Design of Pilots/Demonstrators)

Surround: **Pillar V** (Accompanying Measures: Skills, visibility, citizen engagement).

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# Defining the Boundary Box

## Node 1: Budget & Proportions

Target 10% to 40% of the total budget. There is no fixed maximum, but it must be a balanced Coordination and Support Action (CSA). An overly dominant research part compromises credibility.




## Node 2: Structural Independence

The R&I component must be isolated into a distinct, dedicated Work Package, broken down into meaningful tasks and sub-tasks identical to a traditional RIA project.

## Node 3: Maturity Expectations

The target Technology Readiness Level (TRL) spans from TRL 3 to TRL 7, ensuring the research has genuine commercialization and deployment potential.

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# Two Valid Paths to Topic Selection

## Selecting the Scientific Challenge

### Path A: Regional Smart Specialization (RIS3)

Identify a common denominator across the regional strategies of the consortium.

Explain the exact reasoning for convergence in the proposal.

### Path B: European Policy Priorities

Target macro-goals, specifically the Green and Digital transitions.

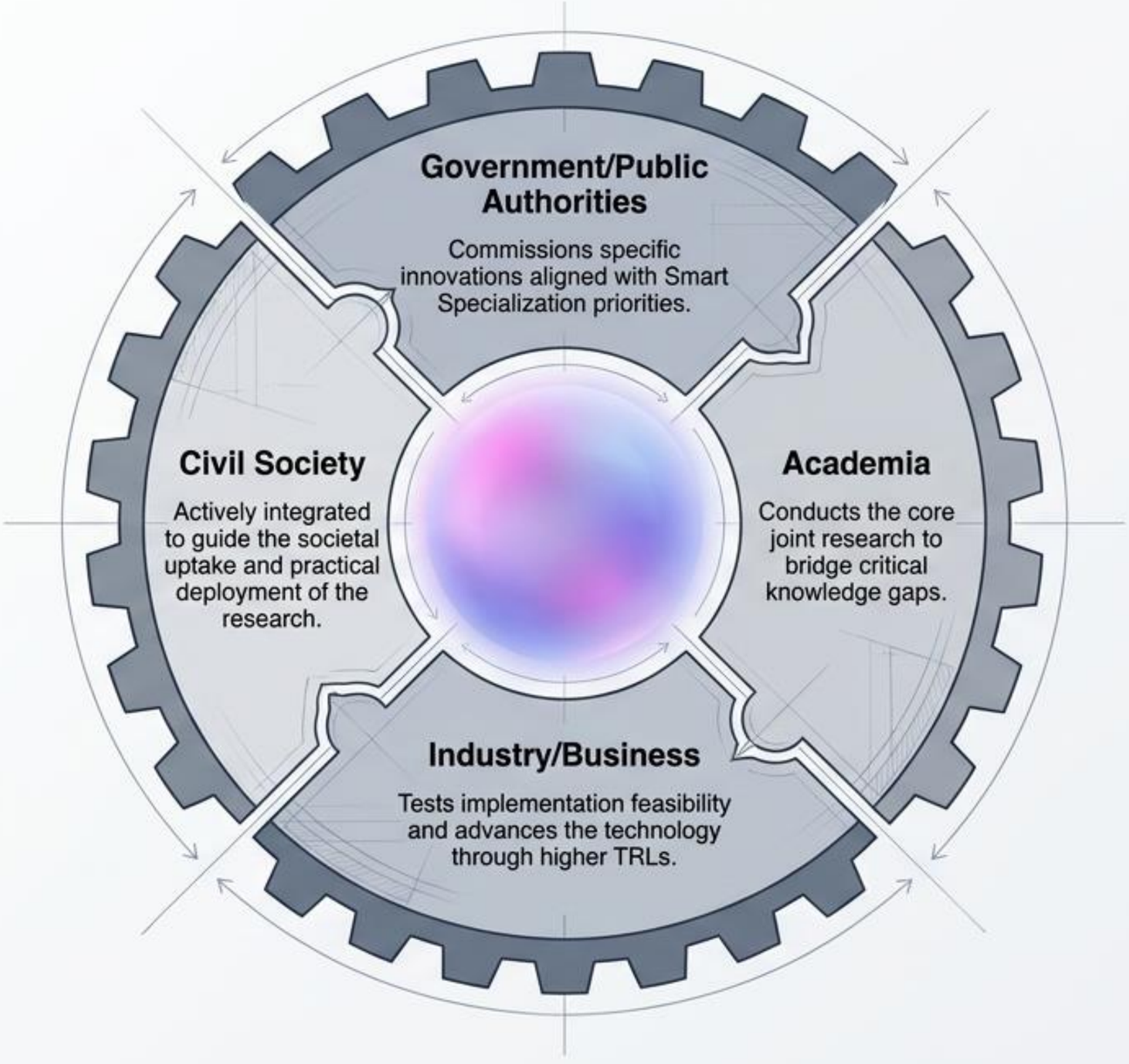
Detail the precise aspect being addressed and forecast the economic benefits.

### The Convergence Point:

The strongest proposals often map a specific regional RIS3 strength directly onto a broader European digital/green priority.

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# Operationalizing the Quadruple Helix




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# Structural Warning: Keep Research Inside the Consortium

## The Wrong Way

Using the R&I budget to run **external** FSTP grant competitions.

**Outcome:** Ineligible or heavily penalized.

## The Risky Way

Running **loose internal competitions** among consortium members.

**Risk:** Negative evaluation if the rules aren't strict, strategy alignment is weak, or winners aren't deeply integrated into the work plan.

## The Right Way

One **large joint project**—or **several smaller, highly coordinated projects**—executed directly by consortium partners.

All activities are pre-defined in the Work Package, aligned with the cross-border strategy, and designed to test collaboration capacities.

**Outcome:** Maximized alignment, deep partner integration, and strong evaluation potential.

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# Through the Evaluator's Lens

## Why is this research needed?

### Excellence

Ambitious questions, scientific novelty, clear methodology, and long-term vision beyond the state-of-the-art.

## What changes because of this?

### Impact

Contribution to regional/EU priorities, innovation potential, and tangible capacity building in Widening countries.

## Can they actually do it?

### Quality of Implementation

Complementarity of partners, access to top-tier infrastructures, appropriate resourcing, and realistic work plan.

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# Diagnostic Matrix: Assessing Proposal Strength

| The Anatomy of a Winning R&I Component | Common Structural Pitfalls |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic Origin:** Driven by clearly identified knowledge gaps and excellence. | Starting with available partners and inventing a topic to fit them. |
| **Consortium Roles:** Complementary expertise with shared scientific ownership. | Excellent institutions operating in silos; Widening partners relegated to administrative roles. |
| **Program Scope:** Limited, ambitious objectives with measurable success indicators. | Overly broad research questions with too many disconnected pilot studies. |
| **Capacity Building:** Integrated directly into the research (skills transfer). | Treated as an isolated work package disconnected from actual science. |

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# Learning from Real Evaluator Critiques

> "The state of the art is not sufficiently assessed for the research component... excellence is not well presented."

**Fix:** Explicitly define current technological limits and dedicate a specific sub-task in the Excellence section to methodological advancement.

> "...aims to create pilot projects but lacks clarity on pilot projects, target user groups, and details about the technologies involved."

**Fix:**
Replace generic pilot descriptions with concrete target demographics, specific TRL benchmarks, and exact operational deployment locations.

> "...the methodology lacks a clear explanation regarding the ecosystems involved... governance of these ecosystems are unsatisfactory."

**Fix:**
Map every partner to a specific phase of the research cycle. Prove access to infrastructure is formally secured, not just assumed.

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# Anticipating and Mitigating Structural Risks

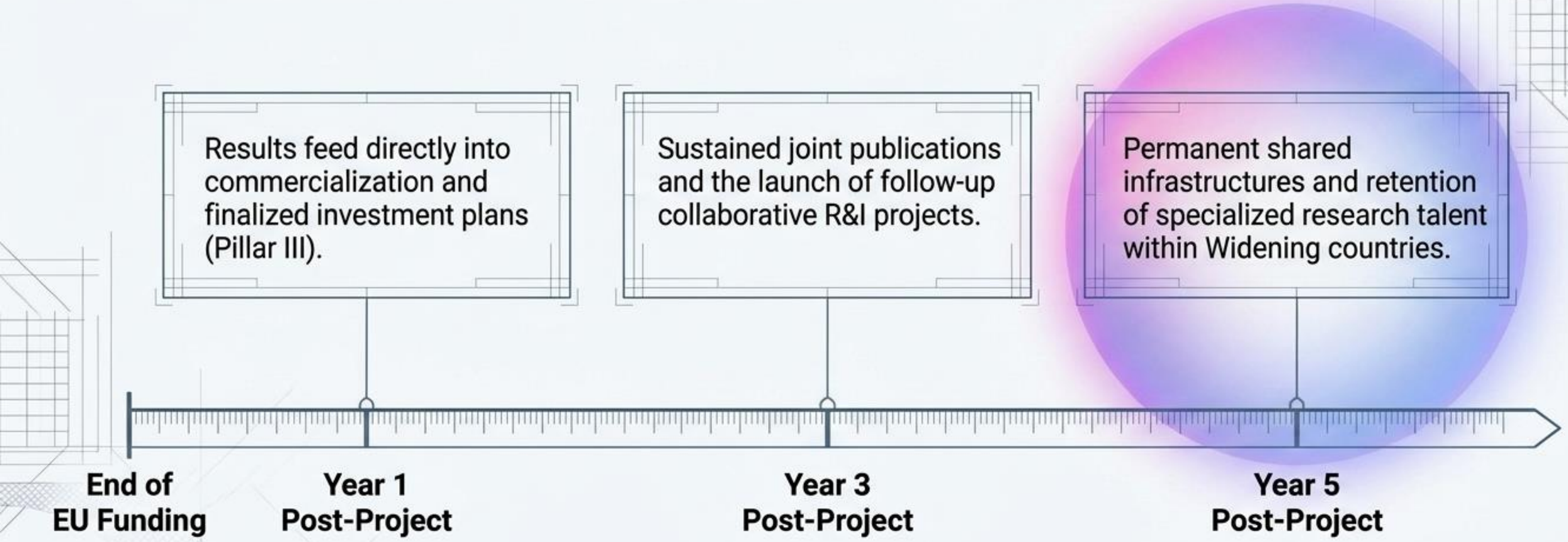
A project without risks appears unambitious. Demonstrate mature foresight.

| Risk Category | Probability | Impact | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Recruitment Delay** | Medium | **High** | Implement early recruitment strategy and utilize pre-existing consortium talent pools. |
| **Data Access Limitation** | Medium | **High** | Establish formal data-sharing agreements prior to grant signature; map alternative open-source datasets. |
| **Experimental Failure** | Low | **High** | Design modular work packages with built-in backup methodologies and pivot points. |

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# Designing for Ecosystem Sustainability

## What remains five years after the project finishes?




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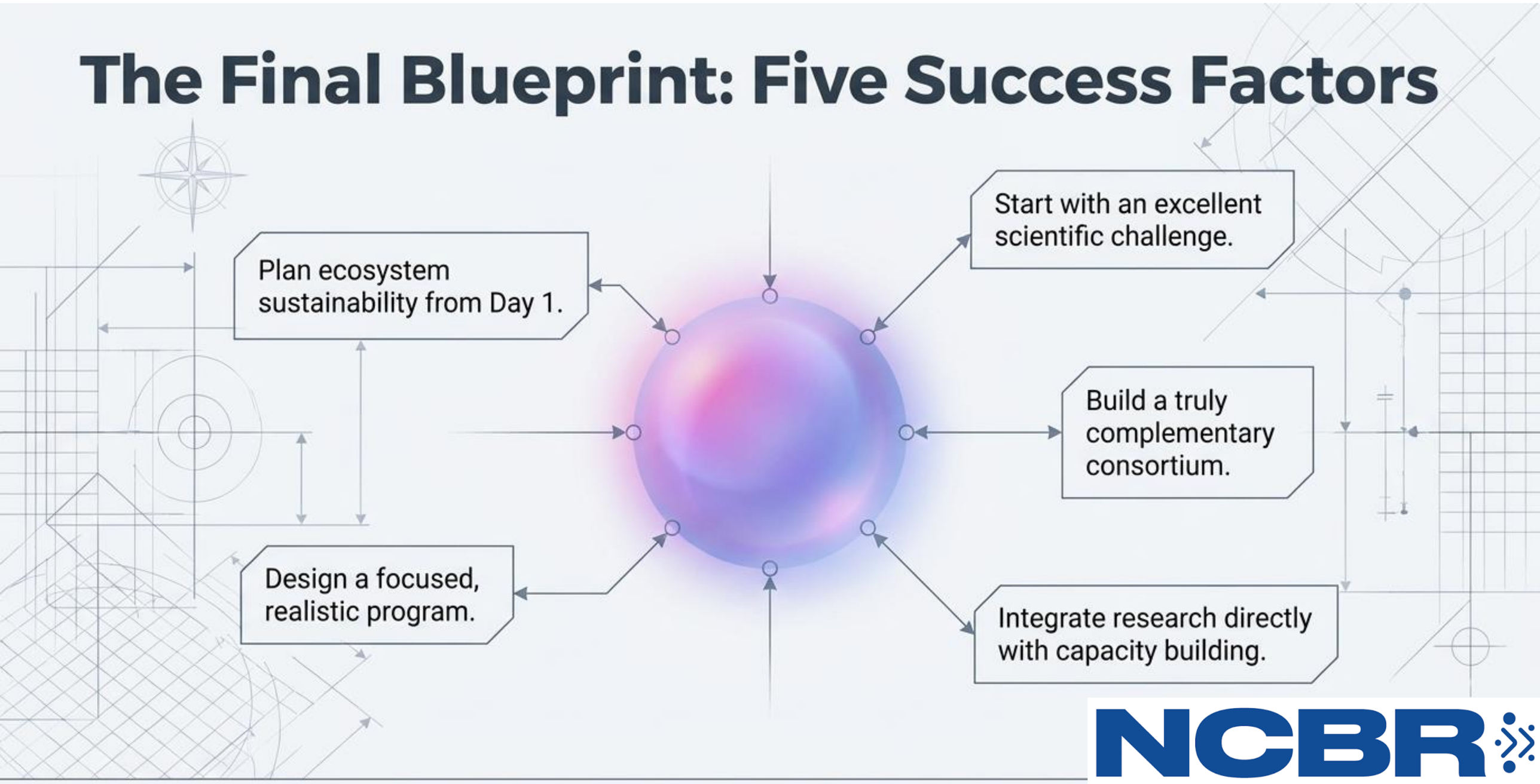
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# The R&I Component Pre-Submission Checklist

- [ ] Is the R&I component isolated into its own discrete Work Package?
- [ ] Is the budget allocation balanced (falling within the 10-40% optimal zone)?
- [ ] Are the specific roles of all four Quadruple Helix actors explicitly mapped to research tasks?
- [ ] Are all joint research activities executed directly by the consortium (no unauthorized FSTP)?
- [ ] Do the expected outcomes clearly bridge the gap to commercial investment (Pillars III & IV)?

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# The Final Blueprint: Five Success Factors




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