UnFound Accelerator – application guidance

Turn your pioneering idea into a successful platform co-op business

Introduction

The UnFound Accelerator is a business support programme for platform co-ops.

The UnFound Accelerator is made possible by The Co-operative Bank, which is also providing £10,000 in prize money to be distributed among the most successful teams.

Key dates

Applications are now open for the 2023 UnFound Accelerator. The deadline is midnight 5 March.

The 2023 edition will start on 26 April 2023 and is composed of the following parts:

- An intensive 10-week programme of masterclasses from 26 April 2022 to 28 June 2023
- A pitch event on 11 July 2023 (TBC)
- One-to-one support to be arranged on the teams' own time from July to November 2023
- An aftercare package for teams that successfully complete the accelerator

About this guidance

This guidance will help you to decide whether the UnFound Accelerator is right for you. It includes information about:

- Who can apply
- An outline of the programme
- Commitments required by participating teams
- All the information you need to complete the application form

We'd like the application process to be inclusive and accessible

If there are any barriers preventing you from applying – or if you require this guidance or the application form in a different format – please email unfound@uk.coop

What is a platform co-op?

A platform co-operative is a democratically owned and controlled business that uses an online platform or mobile app to trade, connect people and pool resources or data.

It is built on co-operative principles and values which ensure the platform business:

- Truly responds to the needs of its community
- Embeds equity and social purpose from day one
- is not controlled by external profit-driven investors.

Platform co-ops are a relatively new phenomenon, with pioneering entrepreneurs setting up businesses in a wide range of sectors across the globe. You can find more information at www.unfound.coop and via the Platform Co-op Consortium.

About the UnFound Accelerator

What is the UnFound Accelerator?

The UnFound Accelerator is a business support programme for teams of entrepreneurs at the early stage of setting up their platform co-operative businesses. Teams will accompany each other in the exciting journey of turning their pioneering ideas into concrete business solutions.

Successful applicants will be provided with guidance and support to set the foundations of their platform business through Co-operatives UK's extensive network of experts, including CoTech and others.

Teams that complete the Accelerator will get the chance to pitch their business idea to access funding and support at an event on 11 July 2023 (TBC), towards which the Co-operative Bank has contributed a £10,000 prize pot.

Is the UnFound Accelerator right for me?

The UnFound Accelerator is for founding teams (of at least 2 people) that have a clear and compelling idea for a platform co-operative and need support to launch their business.

The UnFound Accelerator is for teams:

- Ready to transform their idea into a viable business
- Who believe the co-operative model is right for their platform business – for guidance see "Is a co-op right for me?"
- Looking to register as a co-operative business by the end of 2023.

We expect applications to reference at least two individuals who are part of the team and we will prioritise ideas that are developed and ready to incorporate in 2023 or that are already incorporated.

Programme content

Support participants receive

The UnFound Accelerator will provide a mix of expert guidance and development support across four interconnected business areas:

- Co-operative structures and ways of working
- Product development
- Business planning and strategy
- Brand and marketing

What participants leave with

- Expert guidance on the articles (or rules) to use to incorporate as a co-operative business
- A pitch presenting their business case and brand
- A business plan and a defined funding runway
- A marketing plan for the first steps of their fundraising journey
- A tested prototype and a roadmap to develop their platform

Programme structure

The UnFound Accelerator will lead a cohort of 6-12 teams through an intensive 10-week business development programme followed by tailored one-to-one support.

The main programme

The main programme will run from 26 April to 28 June 2023 and will consist of:

- 10 full day Masterclasses, held online every Wednesday from 10am to 4pm (with breaks).
- Exercises to be completed independently by teams in between the weekly sessions, which should take teams between 2-4 hours to complete

Optional activities

During the year teams will also be offered the following optional activities:

- 9 hours of one-to-one per team with up to three different experts on specific topics or other platform co-op founders
- Fortnightly check-ins: A regular call with the UnFound programme manager to discuss the team's specific challenges and provide guidance

The pitch event

Teams that successfully complete the Masterclasses will have the opportunity to pitch their business idea at an online public event on 11 July 2023 (TBC) attended by potential investors, representatives from leading co-operatives and industry experts. Read about the 2022 pitch event .

Teams may use the pitch to request specific support, and the audience will be given the opportunity to respond to their requests, with funds, resources or support in kind.

The Co-operative Bank has contributed £10,000 towards a prize fund that will be allocated to the teams based on the vote of the audience.

Aftercare

All teams can access free business banking from The Co-operative Bank.

The best performing teams will be awarded an aftercare package composed of:

- Free registration fee for co-ops that incorporate within the calendar year
- A case-study page on Co-operatives UK's website
- Visibility through Co-operatives UK's media channels

Your commitment

- A minimum of one member from each participating team must be able to attend each

Masterclass
- There is no fee to participate in the UnFound Accelerator however, participating teams will be required to have the appropriate equipment and set-up to participate (a computer with a functioning microphone and camera and an internet connection)

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility

In order to be able to apply for the UnFound Accelerator you must meet the following criteria:

- You intend to incorporate your platform co-operative in the UK
- You are a team of at least two members
- At least one member is resident in the UK
- All team members participating in the Accelerator are 18 or older

Availability

- If shortlisted, at least one team member must be available to attend an online interview between 27-30 March 2023. An interview will be compulsory for the shortlisted teams and we will notify you a couple of days in advance
- If accepted on the Accelerator, at least one team member (even on a rotational basis) must be able to attend all the Masterclasses. Masterclasses will take place online each Wednesday from 10 am-5pm (with breaks) from Wednesday 26 April 2023 to Wednesday 28 June 2023
- If accepted on the Accelerator, at least one team member must be available to attend and present at the pitch event (11 July - TBC)

Assessment criteria

If you are eligible to apply, your applications will be evaluated using the below assessment criteria.

Whilst your team does not need to satisfy all criteria, they will guide us in our selection process, so do consider them when completing your application:

1. **Is it a platform co-op?**

We will only accept business ideas that fit our definition of a platform co-operative.

2. **Purpose**

We are looking for ideas where the co-operative model is central to delivering the purpose of the business. Ensure you explain how the co-operative model makes a real difference to the people that use the platform.

3. **Potential impact**

We are particularly interested in supporting platform co-ops that address some of the most pressing challenges of our times. If your platform idea aims to have a broader impact than to simply serve its users, please explain how, and the vision you have for its impact to scale.

4. **Team**

We will be looking at the composition of your team and the skills, experience and network that each of your members will bring to the business, as well as what motivates each of you to set it up. The most successful co-ops are those that respond directly to the needs of their members, so

we expect at least one of your members to be embedded or well connected to the community you wish to serve.

5. **Commitment**

We are looking for teams that are committed to incorporating as a co-operative by the end of 2023 and that will truly benefit from the support provided.

6. **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

We will be looking at how both your team composition and your platform idea embed principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Application process

To apply please fill in the online application form by midnight 5 March 2023.

You should read through the application questions before applying. We advise you to prepare your responses in advance on a separate document and then copy/paste your responses into the form. Please note that we ask for information from each team member so we advise you to co-ordinate all contributions in advance.

You can download this guidance by clicking on the download button on the side.

If there are any barriers preventing you from applying – or if you require the guidance or the application form in a different format – please get in touch at unfound@uk.coop.

Key dates

Key dates for the applications process:

- Applications open: mid-December 2022
- Attend a webinar to learn about the programme, who it's for and what to expect:
  - 24 January 2023, 1-2pm
  - 21 February 2023, 1-2pm
- Application deadline: Midnight 5 March 2023
- Shortlisted applicants will be notified of their interview date and time by 16 March 2023
- Interviews – shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend an online interview: 27-30 March 2023
- Interviewees will be notified if they have been accepted onto the Accelerator by 7 April 2023
- First day of the UnFound Accelerator: 26 April 2023
- Pitch event: 11 July 2023 (date TBC)

Enquiries

We encourage you to discuss your platform co-op idea with the UnFound Programme Manager before applying. You can book a call here.

For any enquiries or technical problems with the application form please email: unfound@uk.coop

Accelerator FAQs

Below are some of the questions we have received. We will update this page as new questions come in.

About the tech

Do I need to know how to code to apply?

No, it is not a requirement.

We already have an MVP (Minimal Viable Product), can we still apply?

Yes, do apply or book a call with us beforehand to discuss your specific case.

The technology for my platform co-op idea exists already and I can use it under a licence agreement, but I would still like to have guidance on how to set up the business. Can I still apply for the UnFound Accelerator?

Yes, do apply. However, please keep in mind that part of the Accelerator will be dedicated to developing your product. If you don't think you would benefit from this type of support, you might want to consider applying to The Hive programme instead.

Our platform is a voice application, would this meet the criteria?

Yes, a platform co-op does not have to include a visual interface.

Does the definition of 'online' include internet alternatives such as IoT, LoRaWAN and Solid networks?

It depends on what you are looking to develop and the type of support you are looking from us, so do get in touch if you want more guidance. Generally speaking, setting up a co-op to share or build infrastructure would not qualify for the UnFound Accelerator; but, if alongside that you are planning to design a platform to give access to the infrastructure or to gather data from it, you would still qualify.

Will CoTech be providing a platform ready to white-label to other co-op users?

No. CoTech will be facilitating sessions to help you develop your own product, be it using off-the-shelf technology, or building your own.

About your team

Why do there have to be at least two team members?

A co-operative needs to be set up with a minimum of two people – depending on the legal form – as a co-operative is a form of organisation that involves co-operation among people or organisations.

The UnFound Accelerator is aimed at teams that are looking at incorporating by the end of 2023, so we will be giving priority to applicants that already have a team in place. However we

acknowledge that this might not be the case for everyone, so we are open to applications where not all the team members are already committed to being a member of the co-operative.

Who qualifies as a team member?

A team member can be someone who is invested and committed to the platform co-op and ready to become a founding member, but it could also be a potential user of the platform, or simply someone who supports the idea but is not committed to becoming a member.

Do all members of the team need to attend every Masterclass?

No only one member needs to attend and it doesn't have to always be the same person.

About your business

We are not sure what 'incorporating' involves, so we cannot commit to incorporating by June 2023. Can we still apply?

Yes, no one will be expected to incorporate before they are ready to. The UnFound Accelerator will offer support in understanding what it means to incorporate and how to. However, we ask you to indicate your intentions to do so, as we want the Accelerator to benefit those that are in most need of our support now as they are looking to set up their business soon.

We are already incorporated, does this mean we don't count as an early-stage co-op?

You are welcome to apply even if you are already an incorporated entity, whether you have incorporated as a co-op or not. By "early-stage" we mean businesses that are not already trading, or if they are, most of their trading is not happening through a platform.

About our support programmes

I applied for the previous edition of the UnFound Accelerator and my application was not successful, can I apply again?

Yes, you may still apply, however, we will expect you to demonstrate some progress on your business idea.

I have already received support via the Platform Co-ops Now course, can I still apply?

Yes, you may still apply, however, please indicate the progress (or not) you have made since, so we can evaluate if you will benefit from the Accelerator.

I have already received support via The Hive, can I still apply?

It will depend on what type of support you have received and when. Please contact us via unfound@uk.coop so we can discuss this together, or indicate the support received in the application.

I am about to receive the support that I have been awarded via The Hive, can I still apply?

Please contact us via unfound@uk.coop to discuss this further as it will depend on your specific case.

I have applied to Co-operatives UK's Business Support programme for start-ups and I am still waiting for the outcome, can I apply to the UnFound Accelerator while I'm waiting for a response?

In this case, do apply. However, it is unlikely we can offer you the support of the UnFound Accelerator and the Business Support programme at the same time. If you have a preference, please let us know in your applications, or get in touch with us via unfound@uk.coop to discuss your specific case.

Preview of the application questions

You can download this document by clicking on the download button on the side.

- We advise you to prepare your responses in advance on a separate document
- If there are any barriers preventing you from applying – or if you require the guidance or the application form in a different format – please contact us via unfound@uk.coop

Privacy statement

The information captured in this application form will help Co-operatives UK review and make a decision on your application to the UnFound Accelerator. The personal data collected on this form will be held securely by Co-operatives UK and will only be used for administration purposes. Co-operatives UK is committed to processing information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and in line with our privacy policy. You are welcome to contact us to discuss the data we hold on you at any time. If your application is successful, we will share your personal details with relevant third parties who will deliver the programme of support. All our third-party support providers are required to take appropriate security measures to protect your personal information in line with our privacy policy and they are only permitted to process your personal data for specified purposes and in accordance with our instructions.

To proceed with the application you must consent to this use of your information.

Your eligibility

In order to be eligible for the UnFound Accelerator you must be able to meet the following criteria.

- You have a team of at least two members

- At least one team member is resident in the UK

- You intend to register your platform co-op in the UK

- You intend to register your platform co-op by the end of 2023

- All team members participating in the UnFound Accelerator are aged 18 or older

If you cannot tick all of the boxes, you are unable to apply to UnFound.

If shortlisted, can at least one team member attend an online interview between 27 and 30 March 2023? Yes / No

An interview will be compulsory for the shortlisted teams and we will notify you by 17 March 2023.

If accepted on the Accelerator, can at least one team member (even on a rotational basis) attend all the Masterclasses? Yes / No

The UnFound Accelerator will commence on Wednesday 26 April 2023 and conclude Wednesday

28 June 2023. Masterclasses will take place online each Wednesday, 10am-4pm (with breaks).

If accepted on the Accelerator, is at least one team member willing to participate in the pitch event? Yes / No

Exact date to be confirmed, but it is likely to be on 11 July. Pitches can also be pre-recorded.

Your lead contact

Please provide the details of the lead contact for the team.

- Lead contact first name
- Lead contact last name
- Lead contact email
- Lead contact phone number

We will use these contact details to communicate with your team.

Your platform co-op

Name of the platform co-op

Website

This is not a requirement.

Which primary trade sector will your business operate in?

- Agriculture, Community Supported Agriculture
- Community Energy, Sustainability and Environment
- Community Retail, Wholesale
- Digital, Creative and Media
- Employment, Training & Education
- Finance
- Health & Social Care
- Housing
- Manufacturing
- Food services, Accommodation, Pubs and Brewing
- Sports & Leisure
- Tourism, Arts, Heritage & Community Hub
- Transport

Choose the most appropriate from the list. Select "Digital, Creative and Media" only if you do not operate in any of the other sectors.

What is the purpose of the platform?

Summarise in one sentence the purpose of your platform co-op. (max. 500 characters)

Who will benefit from the platform?

If there are multiple stakeholders, please list them all, but indicate if there are priorities within the

list. (max. 1000 characters)

What challenge is the platform trying to address? How will it address it?

(Max 2000 characters)

Explain why the co-operative model is right for your platform business.

If you need some guidance, visit our webpage Is a co-op right for you? (max. 1000 characters)

What are the opportunities to scale your platform business?

Tell us about your long term vision for the platform, the scale of the community it wants to serve and the broader impact it can have. (max. 1000 characters)

What do you aim to achieve in the next 3 years?

What milestones or achievements do you aim to reach in the near future? For example, how many users? How many staff members? Key functionalities, etc. (max. 1000 characters)

What work have you undertaken to test your assumptions?

How have you tested your idea? Have you interviewed users? Have you undertaken any research? (max. 1000 characters)

Name three challenges you are facing that you would like to work through as part of the UnFound Accelerator.

Max 500 characters each

If you'd like to share a slide deck about your platform co-op, please upload it here. This is encouraged, but not mandatory.

If you have any other documents you'd like to share with us you can upload them here.

For example, a business plan or anything that you think would contribute to our understanding of your platform business and its objectives.

Your business

Is your business already incorporated?

Yes / No

This is not a requirement to participate in the UnFound programme.

The following question appear only if you respond YES to the question above:

What is the legal form of your business?

- Limited Liability Partnership
- Co-operative Society
- Community Benefit Society

- Charitable Community Benefit Society
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Private Company Limited by Shares
- Public Company Limited by Shares

Is your organisation registered as a:

- Community Interest Company
- Charity
- None of the above

When was the business incorporated? [enter date]

Is the business already trading?

Yes / No

When did the business start trading?

What was the annual turnover of the business in 2021/22?

If you have already received external funding, please indicate which type?

- No external funding
- Donations
- Crowdfunding
- Grants
- Sponsorship
- Investment in the form of equity (not community shares)
- Investment in the form of community shares
- Commercial loans
- Community finance loans
- Other

Choose all that apply

The following question appear only if you respond NO to being incorporated:

If you have already received external funding, please indicate which type?

- No external funding
- Donations
- Crowdfunding
- Grants
- Sponsorship
- Investment in the form of equity (not community shares)
- Investment in the form of community shares
- Commercial loans
- Community finance loans
- Other

About your founding team

Please ask all team members to fill in this part of the form – even those who cannot attend the UnFound Accelerator.

The form allows for a minimum of two team members and a maximum of five. Please fill in the following questions for each team member. If you have more than five team members you can tell us more about them if you are shortlisted.

Please fill in the following details for team member:

- First name
- Last name

Will you be attending the UnFound Accelerator?

- Yes all Masterclasses
- Yes, some of the Masterclasses
- No
- Other

If there are barriers to your participation in the UnFound Masterclasses, please let us know here.

Where are you based? If not in the UK please select 'Other' and indicate town and country.

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and Humberside
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- London
- East of England
- South East
- South West
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- The Channel Islands
- Other

Please provide a short biography outlining your skills, experiences and what you bring to the business.

If you have an existing relationship with the stakeholders of the platform, please mention it here (max. 2000 characters)

What is your motivation to set up the business?

(max 1000 characters)

If you identify with any groups that are underrepresented in the tech sector, the co-operative

sector or the broader business community, please indicate it here.

Please fill in the details above for each team member.

Additional questions about your team

What experience do you have working as a team?

(max. 1000 characters)

What gaps do you see in your current team?

Tell us more about how you see your team growing in the future and the type of skills and experience you will be looking for (max. 1000 characters)

Before submitting your application

The Co-operative Bank

Through our partnership with The Co-operative Bank we are pleased to signpost to the Community DirectPlus Account, which is FREE to co-operatives. You can find out more here. Please select your preference below.

I am happy for The Co-operative Bank to contact me about their free business banking offer for co-operative businesses. Yes / No

Submission

If you are happy with the details completed on this form, you can now submit the form.

If you wish to check any details before you submit, you can navigate to the previous pages by using the menu at the top or by hitting the 'previous page' button.

Once you have submitted you will be sent a confirmation email with a pdf copy of the application you submitted.

Should you not receive a confirmation email, please get in touch via unfound@uk.coop to check if we have received your application.

Apply for the UnFound Accelerator

Before you apply

1. Make sure you've read all of the guidance on these pages and you know you are eligible to apply

In order to be eligible for the UnFound Accelerator you must be able to meet the following criteria:

- You have a team of at least two members
- At least one team member is resident in the UK
- You intend to register your platform co-op in the UK
- You intend to register your platform co-op by the end of 2023
- All team members participating in the UnFound Accelerator are aged 18 or older

2. We strongly recommend preparing your answers in advance before starting your application

Ready to apply?

You can save your application at any stage – simply follow the 'Save my progress and resume later' instructions on the form.

Start your application

> **Get started**

Sign up for updates

If you'd like to be kept in touch about future opportunities relating to platform co-operatives, sign up for the UnFound newsletter.

https://www.uk.coop/resources/unfound-accelerator-application-guidance

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