

**PITCH ME!**

**PLAYBOOK**



**UKTCG**

UK Tech Cluster Group

# WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS FOR

This playbook is designed to help regional delivery partners confidently set up, run, and sustain Pitch Me! in their local ecosystem.

## **By using this playbook, delivery partners should be able to:**

- Understand why Pitch Me! exists and what success looks like
- Set up and deliver Pitch Me! from scratch with minimal external support
- Run sessions consistently, professionally, and at high quality
- Recruit the right founders and pitch listeners
- Manage risk, expectations, and delivery quality
- Improve the format over time without losing what makes it work

## **Think of this playbook as:**

**Principles + Process + Practical tools**



# PLAYBOOK STRUCTURE



## **1. Introduction & context**

Explains the purpose of Pitch Me!, who it is for, what it is (and is not), the problem it solves for early-stage founders, who should run it, and how it fits within the Regional Tech Booster Programme.

## **2. The Pitch Me! model (non-negotiables)**

Defines the core model that protects quality nationally, including founder-first principles, constructive challenge, online-first delivery, early-stage focus, trusted pitch listeners, and a feedback-led format. Clearly sets out must-haves, nice-to-haves, and things to avoid.

## **3. Roles & responsibilities**

Clarifies who does what - outlines responsibilities, time commitment, and skills needed, with a focus on small delivery teams.

## **4. Setting up Pitch Me! in a new region**

A step-by-step setup guide covering timelines, key delivery decisions, branding considerations, data protection, and essential tools. Designed as a practical checklist.

## **5. Recruiting & preparing founders**

Guidance on identifying the right founders, managing applications, selecting participants, briefing founders properly, and setting expectations around feedback versus investment.

## **6. Recruiting & managing pitch listeners**

Explains what makes a trusted pitch listener, how to build a balanced panel, how to brief advisors on tone and boundaries, and how to manage conflicts of interest and dominant personalities.

## **7. Running the event (live delivery)**

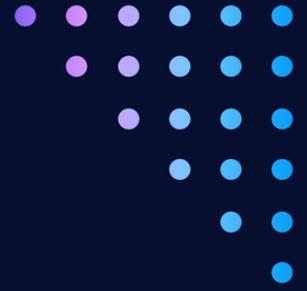
A practical run-of-show covering session structure, timekeeping, pitch format, feedback approach, and facilitator intervention to protect the founder experience.

# PLAYBOOK STRUCTURE



- 8. After the event** Outlines founder and pitch listener follow-up, optional introductions, feedback collection, and internal reflection to support continuous improvement.
- 9. Measuring success & reporting** Sets out what success looks like locally, suggested metrics, qualitative outcomes, and what to report back to programme leads.
- 10. Common challenges & how to handle them** Practical, experience-led guidance on issues such as low-quality applications, advisors selling, founders becoming defensive, sessions overrunning, and pressure to turn Pitch Me! into a pitch competition.
- 11. Appendices & templates** Includes ready-to-use tools such as founder applications, briefing templates, agendas, feedback forms, delivery checklists, and example communications.

# THE CORE PITCH ME! MODEL & PRINCIPLES



## What Pitch Me! is

Pitch Me! is a structured, founder-first pitching and feedback session designed to support early-stage startup founders to test, refine, and strengthen their business ideas.

### Each Pitch Me! session gives founders the opportunity to:

- Pitch their business or idea in a supportive environment
- Receive constructive challenge, feedback, and advice
- Improve both the substance of their idea and how they communicate it
- Learn from listening to other founders pitch and receive feedback

Pitch Me! is not a competition, not an investment pitch event, and not a demo day. Its value lies in honest, practical feedback from experienced people who are there to listen, not to sell.

## The Pitch Me! format (core model)

### A standard Pitch Me! session follows this format:

- 3–4 founders per session
- Up to 10 minutes per pitch (founder-led)
- Followed by structured feedback, questions, and discussion from a panel of pitch listeners
- Delivered online, typically over lunchtime (12.30–2.30pm)
- Observed by a small audience, where appropriate, to allow peer learning

### Sessions are intentionally kept small to ensure:

- Depth of feedback rather than surface-level commentary
- Psychological safety for founders
- Enough time for meaningful discussion rather than rushed advice

## Pitch listeners (the panel)

Pitch Me! uses a panel of experienced “pitch listeners”, not judges.

### **Pitch listeners are typically drawn from a mix of backgrounds such as:**

- Founders and exited founders
- Operators and senior leaders from scaling businesses
- Sector specialists
- Advisors, mentors, or ecosystem leaders

### **Panels change from session to session, but should always be:**

- Varied, to provide multiple perspectives
- Relevant, to early-stage challenges
- Independent, with no expectation of selling services or securing investment

### **The role of the pitch listener is to:**

- Listen carefully
- Ask thoughtful, challenging questions
- Share experience-based insight
- Help founders think more clearly about their next steps

**Founder-first, always** - The session exists to support founders, not to promote advisors, organisations, or investors. Every decision should be made with founder value in mind.

**Constructive challenge, not criticism** - Feedback should be honest and stretching, but always delivered respectfully and with intent to help. The goal is clarity and improvement, not judgement.

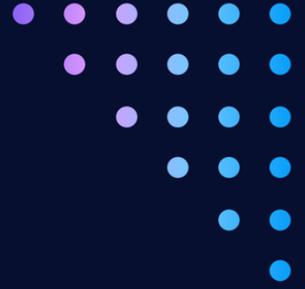
**Safe but real** - Pitch Me! is a safe space to test ideas, but not a soft space. Founders should expect real-world questions and perspectives, delivered in a supportive way.

**Early-stage appropriate** - Pitch Me! is designed for founders at idea, pre-seed, or early traction stage. The language, advice, and expectations should reflect this.

**Listening over lecturing** - Pitch listeners should spend more time asking questions than giving monologues. Long lectures, sales pitches, or generic advice undermine the format.

**Consistency over scale** - It is better to run fewer, high-quality sessions than to scale quickly at the expense of depth and trust.

## What Pitch Me! is not



### To protect the integrity of the model, Pitch Me! should not become:

- A pitch competition with winners and losers
- An investor demo day
- A sales or lead-generation event for advisors
- A large audience showcase
- A heavily scripted or over-produced experience

Regions are encouraged to adapt delivery details, but not these fundamentals.

## Why the model works

### The Pitch Me! model works because it:

- Lowers the stakes compared to investor pitching
- Encourages learning through dialogue, not performance
- Builds founder confidence through practice and repetition
- Creates peer learning by observing others
- Builds trust within local and national ecosystems

# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES



Pitch Me! can be delivered effectively with a small, well-defined team. In most regions, a single person will cover multiple roles. What matters is clarity of responsibility, not headcount.

In the standard delivery model, Pitch Me! is run by two core roles.

## 1. Programme Lead, Founder Coordinator, and Logistics Lead

*(Single combined role)*

Purpose: Overall ownership of Pitch Me! delivery in the region, from setup through to follow-up.

This role is the operational backbone of Pitch Me! and is responsible for both quality and continuity.

### **Key responsibilities:**

- Acts as the primary point of contact for Pitch Me!
- Owns local planning, scheduling, and delivery
- Promotes Pitch Me! and recruits founders
- Manages the founder application and selection process
- Briefs founders ahead of the session and sets expectations
- Handles all event logistics and technical setup
- Oversees post-event follow-up and feedback
- Ensures the Pitch Me! model and principles are upheld
- Manages reporting requirements where applicable

### **Time commitment:**

- Setup phase: higher input for first 1–2 sessions
- Ongoing delivery: typically 4–6 hours per session

### **Skills and experience:**

- Strong understanding of early-stage founders and startups
- Organised and reliable
- Clear communicator with empathy for founders
- Comfortable making judgement calls to protect quality
- Confident using online event platforms

## 2. Event Host and Facilitator

Purpose: To run the live Pitch Me! session and protect the quality of the experience in real time.

This role is critical to ensuring sessions are supportive, focused, and valuable.

### Key responsibilities:

- Hosts the online session
- Sets the tone and reinforces expectations at the start
- Keeps pitches and feedback to time
- Facilitates discussion between founders and pitch listeners
- Ensures feedback remains constructive and relevant
- Intervenes where discussion becomes unhelpful, overly critical, or off-topic
- Creates a safe but challenging environment for founders

### Time commitment:

- Preparation: 1–2 hours per session
- Delivery: 2 hours live

### Skills and experience:

- Confident and experienced facilitator
- Comfortable managing group dynamics
- Able to challenge advisors when necessary
- Experienced working with early-stage founders

### 3. Advisor (Pitch Listener) Coordinator

*(May be the same person as Role 1 in smaller teams)*

Purpose: To recruit, brief, and retain high-quality pitch listeners.

#### **Key responsibilities:**

- Identifies and recruits suitable pitch listeners
- Ensures panels are varied and relevant
- Briefs advisors on expectations, tone, and boundaries
- Manages availability and rotation
- Acts as first point of contact for advisors

#### **Time commitment:**

- 2–4 hours per session once a panel pool is established

#### **Skills and experience:**

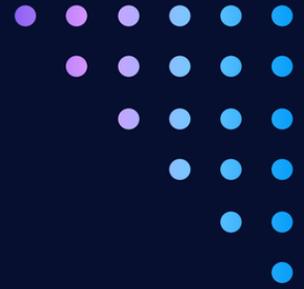
- Strong local network
- Good judgement of people and motivations
- Confident setting boundaries
- Committed to founder-first delivery

### **Accountability and quality control**

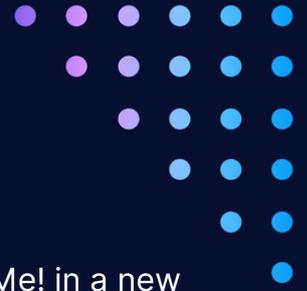
The **Programme Lead role (Role 1)** holds overall accountability for:

- Adherence to the Pitch Me! principles
- Founder experience and safety
- Advisor behaviour and contribution
- Consistency and quality of delivery

Even where roles overlap, accountability should never be unclear



# SETTING UP PITCH ME! IN A NEW REGION



This section outlines the recommended process for setting up Pitch Me! in a new region for the first time. While regions may adapt details to suit local context, following this structure will help ensure quality, consistency, and a strong founder experience from the outset. A typical setup period is 6–8 weeks before the first live session.

## Step 1: Confirm local ownership and capacity

Before any promotion begins, confirm that there is:

- A named Programme Lead responsible for delivery
- Capacity to run at least two sessions, not just a one-off
- Agreement to uphold the Pitch Me! model and principles

*Pitch Me! works best when founders can trust it will run consistently over time.*

## Step 2: Define your local delivery parameters

Make a small number of clear decisions early to avoid confusion later.

These include:

- Session frequency (for example, monthly or bi-monthly)
- Founder capacity (recommended 3–4 founders per session)
- Audience size (if any)
- Sector focus (generalist or themed sessions)

*Early-stage, generalist sessions are recommended for initial delivery.*

## Step 3: Select your delivery tools

Pitch Me! is designed to be **online-first**.

At a minimum, you will need:

- A reliable video conferencing platform
- A way to collect founder applications (form or email)
- A simple system to track founders, advisors, and attendance
- An email tool for confirmations and reminders

*Avoid complex systems. Simplicity supports consistency.*

## Step 4: Build your pitch listener pool

Before recruiting founders, identify and secure a small pool of potential pitch listeners.

Recommended approach:

- Start with 6–10 trusted individuals
- Aim for a mix of backgrounds and expertise
- Confirm availability for at least one session

All pitch listeners should be briefed clearly on:

- The purpose of Pitch Me!
- Their role as listeners, not judges or sellers
- Expected tone and time commitment

## Step 5: Open founder applications

Once listeners and dates are confirmed, open founder applications.

Best practice includes:

- Clear messaging about who Pitch Me! is for
- Clear explanation that this is feedback-led, not investment-focused
- A short, accessible application process
- A visible deadline

*Applications should focus on understanding the idea and stage, not on polish.*

## Step 6: Select and prepare founders

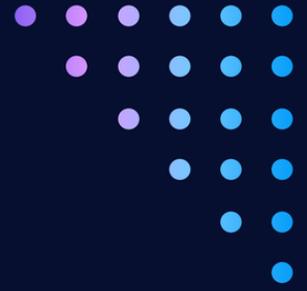
Founders should be selected based on:

- Stage appropriateness
- Willingness to receive feedback
- Fit with the session theme (if applicable)

Once selected:

- Confirm pitch length and format
- Share expectations around feedback and participation
- Provide joining instructions and technical guidance
- Encourage founders to focus on clarity over slides

*A short pre-event briefing significantly improves session quality.*



## Step 7: Finalise the session plan

In the week leading up to the event:

- Confirm attendance of founders and pitch listeners
- Share the agenda and timings
- Test the online platform
- Prepare prompts or questions for facilitation
- Plan timekeeping and transitions

This preparation helps the live session run smoothly and professionally.

## Step 8: Deliver the session

On the day:

- Open the session early to resolve technical issues
- Set expectations and ground rules at the start
- Keep pitches and feedback to time
- Protect the founder-first tone throughout

*Consistency and facilitation are more important than perfection.*

## Step 9: Follow up and reflect

After the session:

- Thank founders and pitch listeners
- Share any agreed follow-up actions or resources
- Collect feedback from participants
- Hold a short internal debrief to capture learning

*Continuous improvement is encouraged, but changes should not undermine the core model.*

# RECRUITING & PREPARING FOUNDERS



The quality of Pitch Me! is strongly influenced by the suitability and preparedness of the founders pitching. Clear communication and expectation-setting are essential.

## Founder profile

Pitch Me! is best suited to founders who are:

- At idea, pre-seed, or early traction stage
- Actively working on a startup or new venture
- Open to feedback, challenge, and questioning
- Willing to learn from peers as well as advisors

It is not designed for:

- Fully scaled businesses
- Founders seeking immediate investment
- Those unwilling to engage in open discussion

## Founder applications

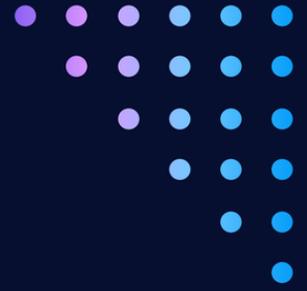
Applications should be:

- Short and accessible
- Focused on understanding the idea, stage, and challenges
- Easy to complete without pitch decks or polished materials

Useful application prompts include:

- What problem are you trying to solve?
- Who is this for?
- What stage are you at?
- What kind of feedback would be most helpful?

*Avoid questions that reward polish over substance.*



## Founder selection

Select founders based on:

- Stage appropriateness
- Clarity of idea, not perfection
- Willingness to receive feedback
- Balance across the session (avoid overly similar businesses)

*Where applications exceed capacity, be transparent and encouraging in any decline communications.*

## Founder preparation

All founders should receive a short pre-event briefing covering:

- Pitch length and format (up to 10 minutes)
- Use of slides (optional, not required)
- The feedback-led nature of the session
- The role of pitch listeners
- Expected tone and participation

*Clear preparation significantly improves the quality of discussion and reduces anxiety.*

# RECRUITING & MANAGING PITCH LISTENERS



Pitch listeners are central to the success of Pitch Me!. Careful selection and briefing are critical.

## What makes a good pitch listener

### Effective pitch listeners:

- Have lived experience relevant to startups
- Are curious and good listeners
- Can challenge constructively
- Speak plainly and practically
- Do not dominate discussion

### They do not:

- Sell services
- Pitch themselves
- Judge or rank founders

## Building a balanced panel

Each session should aim for:

- 3–5 pitch listeners
- A mix of backgrounds and perspectives
- No single dominant voice or sector

*Variety improves insight and reduces bias.*

## Briefing pitch listeners

Before each session, pitch listeners should be briefed on:

- The purpose of Pitch Me!
- The founder-first principle
- Expected tone and time awareness
- Avoiding sales, jargon, or long monologues

*Setting expectations early prevents issues later.*

## Managing behaviour and boundaries

The facilitator should:

- Intervene if feedback becomes unhelpful
- Redirect overly long contributions
- Reinforce listening over lecturing

*Protecting the founders experience takes priority over advisor comfort.*

# RUNNING THE PITCH ME! SESSION (LIVE DELIVERY)



This section outlines recommended live delivery practice.

## Session structure (example)

- Welcome and framing (10 minutes)
- Founder pitches and feedback (20–25 minutes per founder)
- Short comfort breaks if needed
- Close and next steps (5–10 minutes)

*Exact timings may vary, but time discipline is essential.*

## Pitch delivery

- Up to 10 minutes per founder
- Slides optional
- Founders should focus on clarity, not polish
- Facilitator should give clear time warnings

## Feedback and discussion

### Feedback should:

- Start with clarifying questions
- Focus on the business and the pitch
- Be specific and actionable
- Avoid generic advice

*The facilitator should manage flow and balance participation.*

## Managing the room

The facilitator should:

- Set ground rules at the start
- Keep energy constructive and focused
- Ensure all founders receive equal attention
- Maintain a safe but challenging environment

# AFTER THE SESSION

Follow-up reinforces learning and builds trust.

## Founder follow-up

### Within a few days:

- Thank founders for participating
- Share any agreed resources or connections
- Encourage reflection and next steps
- Invite feedback

## Pitch listener follow-up

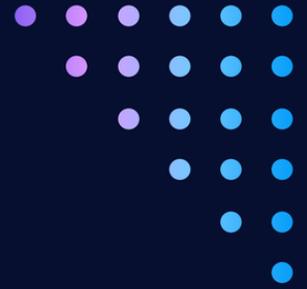
- Thank pitch listeners
- Share anonymised feedback or outcomes where appropriate
- Confirm future availability
- Strong relationships support long-term delivery.

## Internal reflection

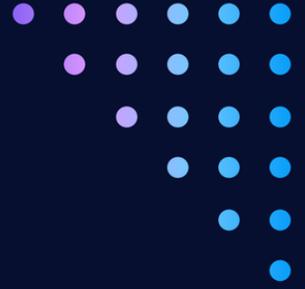
### After each session:

- Capture what worked well
- Note areas for improvement
- Adjust process, not principles

*Continuous improvement is encouraged.*



# COMMON CHALLENGES & HOW TO HANDLE THEM



## **Low-quality or unsuitable applications**

Be clear about who Pitch Me! is for and apply firm but fair selection.

## **Advisors selling or over-talking**

Brief clearly and intervene early.

## **Founders being defensive**

Normalise challenge and set expectations upfront.

## **Sessions overrunning**

Protect time ruthlessly and reduce capacity if needed.

## **Pressure to turn it into a demo day**

Reinforce principles and purpose.

# FOUNDER PRE-EVENT BRIEFING



## Subject: Pitch Me! – what to expect and how to prepare

### Body:

Thank you for being selected to pitch at Pitch Me!

Pitch Me! is a founder-first, feedback-led session designed to help you strengthen both your idea and how you communicate it. It is not a competition or an investment pitch.

### How the session works

- You will have up to 10 minutes to pitch your idea or business
- Slides are optional. Clarity matters more than polish
- After your pitch, experienced pitch listeners will ask questions and share feedback
- Feedback may be challenging, but it is always constructive and supportive

### How to prepare

- Focus on explaining the problem, your approach, and where you're unsure
- Be open to questions and challenge
- Use the session to test your thinking, not to perform

### Session details

- Date and time: XX/XX/XXXX
- Platform and joining link: XXX
- Please join 5–10 minutes early to test audio and video

If you have any questions ahead of the session, get in touch.

Best wishes,  
XXX

# PITCH LISTENER BRIEFING

## Subject: Pitch Me! briefing and session details

Thank you for joining Pitch Me! as a pitch listener.

Pitch Me! is designed to support early-stage founders through constructive feedback and discussion. Your role is to listen carefully, ask thoughtful questions, and share relevant experience.

### Please note

- This is not a judging or investment event
- Feedback should be practical, specific, and respectful
- Questions are often more helpful than advice
- Please avoid selling services or pitching yourself
- Be mindful of time and space for others

### Session details

- Date and time: XX/XX/XXXX
- Platform and joining link: XXX
- Number of founders pitching: X

Your contribution helps create a safe but challenging environment for founders.

Thank you for supporting the next generation of startups.

# PITCH ME APPLICATION FORM

USE GOOGLE OR HUBSPOT FORMS

Pitch Me! is a supportive, feedback-led pitching session for early-stage founders. It is not a competition or an investment event. The aim is to help you sharpen your idea and your pitch through constructive challenge and discussion.

## Fields:

- Founder name
- Startup name (if applicable)
- Email address
- Region
- Website or LinkedIn (optional)

## Your idea

- Briefly describe your idea or business (max 150 words)
- What problem are you solving, and for whom? (max 150 words)

## Your stage

- Which best describes your current stage?
  - Idea stage
  - Pre-revenue
  - Early traction

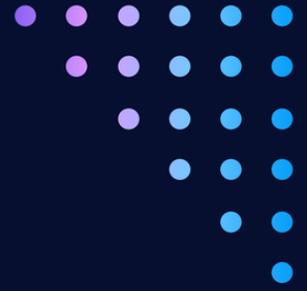
## Your goals

- What would you most like feedback or challenge on?
- What do you hope to get out of pitching at Pitch Me!?

## Consent and access

- Are you comfortable receiving open feedback in a group setting? (Yes / No)
- Do you have any access or support needs we should be aware of?

# PITCH ME! SESSION AGENDA



(Facilitator-facing)

Example agenda (12.30–2.30pm)

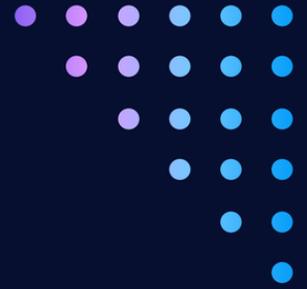
- 12.30–12.40: Welcome, introductions, and session framing
- 12.40–1.05: Founder 1: pitch and feedback
- 1.05–1.30: Founder 2: pitch and feedback
- 1.30–1.35: Short break
- 1.35–2.00: Founder 3: pitch and feedback
- 2.00–2.25: Founder 4: pitch and feedback (if applicable)
- 2.25–2.30: Close and next steps

## POST-SESSION FOUNDER FEEDBACK FORM

(Fillable)

- Overall, how useful was the session? (1–5)
- What was the most valuable part for you?
- Was the feedback clear and constructive?
- Do you feel more confident about your idea or pitch?
- What could be improved?
- Would you recommend Pitch Me! to another founder? (Yes / No)
- Any additional comments?

# SESSION DELIVERY CHECKLIST



(Internal use)

## Before

- Founders selected and briefed
- Pitch listeners confirmed and briefed
- Agenda finalised
- Platform tested

## During

- Session opened early
- Ground rules clearly set
- Time actively managed
- Facilitator intervenes when needed

## After

- Thank-you emails sent
- Feedback collected
- Internal reflections captured

## Internal Reflection Notes

(Internal use)

- What worked well?
- What could be improved?
- Was the founder mix right?
- Was the pitch listener panel balanced?
- Did we uphold the Pitch Me! principles?
- Actions for next session