



Your Business in STEAM

**PHASE 4: CONNECTIONS,
SCALING & LONG-TERM
SUCCESS**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Phase 4

You've come a long way on your FabConnectHer learning experience. In the previous phases, you developed your idea, built your product, crafted your brand, and started reaching customers. Now, Phase 4 focuses on what comes next: building connections, scaling your business, nurturing resilience, and creating the foundations for long-term success.

This phase is about strengthening your entrepreneurial connections, expanding your professional network, and developing strategies to sustain and grow your STEAM venture over time. You'll learn to build meaningful partnerships and explore practical approaches to overcoming challenges as you scale.



By the end of Phase 4, you will understand how to:

- Master networking strategies and learn to build partnerships with peers, industry leaders, and academic institutions that can support your growth.
- Develop resilience and scaling strategies to navigate challenges, adapt to change, and position your business for sustainable, long-term success.
- Benefit from the many other facets of the FabConnectHer project, developed specifically for woman in STEAM and Fab Labs.

Phase 4 will equip you with the mindset, connections, and strategies to take your STEAM business further than you ever imagined. Let's finish strong!

Duration

This phase is designed to take about 2-4 hours to complete, though this can vary based on how much you choose to explore, research, and refine your approach.

This allows you to work at your own pace and engage with the content to the extent that best suits your needs.

Materials

You will need basic materials such as paper, pens, sticky notes, and digital tools for brainstorming, mind mapping, and designing. Some activities may also require access to the FabLab, where resources like 3D printers, prototyping tools, or other relevant technologies can support your work.

FabLab Connection

The FabLab provides a practical, hands-on environment that is perfect for enhancing your customer relationship strategies. In this module, you can use the FabLab to create engaging prototypes, interactive feedback tools, or personalized customer experience displays. Whether you're crafting quick prototypes to test customer engagement ideas or building detailed interactive setups to enhance your customer journey, the FabLab supports your efforts to transform creative concepts into meaningful customer interactions



Unit 12

CONNECTIONS, NETWORKING AND BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Future Female Innovators In STEAM



Connections, networking and building partnerships

Introduction

Strong connections and networks are one of the most valuable assets in entrepreneurship. Across STEAM sectors, successful businesses grow through relationships with mentors, collaborators, researchers, customers, suppliers, investors, industry experts, and fellow entrepreneurs who contribute knowledge, opportunity, and support along the way.

For example, a woman developing a sustainable fashion product may connect with a university materials lab to test biodegradable fabrics, while also partnering with local designers and ethical manufacturers to bring the product to market. A female fabrication entrepreneur developing modular furniture from recycled materials might collaborate with a local maker space, CNC technicians, sustainable material suppliers and interior designers to prototype, test, and refine her product before launching to the market.

Women entrepreneurs are increasingly shaping dynamic networks across science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Fab labs, maker spaces, innovation hubs, universities, online platforms, and industry events are particularly powerful for women innovators to build connections that, in turn, strengthen creativity, technical skills, leadership, and most importantly, business development.

Many early-stage entrepreneurs first meet collaborators through fabrication workshops, hackathons, women-in-tech communities, digital fabrication labs, accelerator programmes, or LinkedIn networking groups. A single introduction at a maker event can lead to mentoring, technical advice, prototype development support, or future business partnerships.

Building Technical and Commercial Partnerships

Partnerships are a central part of the fabrication and STEAM ecosystem, where innovation often depends on combining different types of expertise, technology, facilities, and market access. Successful entrepreneurs regularly build partnerships with fabrication laboratories, prototype developers, engineers, material suppliers, software specialists, universities, creative professionals, manufacturers, and enterprise support organisations. For example, a wearable technology entrepreneur may partner with electronics engineers to integrate sensors into products, collaborate with a fab lab to access 3D printing and laser-cutting equipment, and work with software developers to create connected digital applications.

Technical partnerships can also support testing, prototyping, product refinement, certification, packaging design, digital manufacturing, and scaling production. Commercial partnerships, meanwhile, can strengthen branding, distribution, online sales, and access to new customer groups or international markets.

For women in STEAM, digital networking platforms such as LinkedIn, online maker communities, webinars, and innovation forums have created new ways to build professional visibility and connect with collaborators across regions and sectors. At the same time, fabrication festivals, trade fairs, workshops, and local enterprise events continue to provide valuable opportunities for relationship-building and exchange. We will explore more soon.

This unit explores how to build purposeful professional networks, identify valuable partnerships, and develop strong collaborative relationships that support long-term entrepreneurial growth within the STEAM and fabrication ecosystem.

In this unit, you will:

- understand the role of connections and networking in entrepreneurship and innovation;
- identify different types of partnerships that support fabrication and STEAM businesses;
- explore strategies for building authentic and valuable professional relationships;
- learn how collaboration can strengthen innovation, visibility, and business growth;
- recognise how digital and in-person networking opportunities can support entrepreneurial development

Mastering networking strategies

Networking is the process of building professional relationships that offer mutual benefit. These relationships can provide advice, resources, mentorship, and opportunities. The scope of networking includes:



Across Europe and internationally, fab labs and maker communities regularly organise networking events where entrepreneurs, makers, designers, engineers, and innovators can meet collaborators, test ideas, and build partnerships. Have you been involved in ?

Fab Lab Open Nights

Many fab labs host informal evening sessions where members showcase projects, demonstrate equipment, and discuss ideas with other makers. These events are particularly useful for meeting people with complementary technical skills such as 3D printing, electronics, laser cutting, coding, or digital design.

University and Innovation Hub Events

Universities and innovation hubs frequently organise entrepreneurship evenings, prototype showcases, startup talks, and innovation networking events. These spaces are valuable for connecting with researchers, students, technical specialists, and enterprise support organisations.

Fab Festivals and Maker Faires

Maker Faires and fabrication festivals combine exhibitions, demonstrations, workshops, and networking opportunities. Entrepreneurs can showcase products, meet suppliers, connect with fabrication experts, and engage with potential customers or investors. Examples of activities at these events include:

- live 3D printing demonstrations;
- CNC machining showcases;
- digital embroidery and smart textile workshops;
- sustainable material innovation displays;
- startup pitch sessions;
- prototype exhibitions.

Maker Meet-Ups and Community Build Sessions

Maker meet-ups often focus on collaborative problem-solving and shared learning. Participants may bring unfinished projects, technical challenges, or prototype ideas and receive feedback from other members of the community. Typical themes include:

- sustainable product design;
- robotics and automation;
- Arduino and Raspberry Pi projects;
- digital fabrication techniques;
- textile innovation and smart materials;
- repair and circular economy projects.

These sessions help entrepreneurs build relationships while also strengthening technical confidence and practical skills.

Online Fab Lab Communities

Networking also increasingly takes place online through:

- LinkedIn maker and STEAM groups;
- Discord maker communities;
- Fab Lab Network forums;
- online design collaboration spaces;
- webinar series and virtual innovation events

Networking in practice

Networking opportunities take many forms across the European fabrication ecosystem. The five examples below show how each format from the previous slide looks in practice, with European communities you can engage with today. Names in pink are clickable links.

Fab Lab Open Nights

[Fab Lab Barcelona](#) · [Fab Lab Reykjavik](#) · [VIVA Lab Porto](#)

Regular evening sessions across European fab labs where members showcase prototypes, demonstrate equipment such as 3D printers and laser cutters, and exchange ideas. Many host monthly open evenings listed on their calendars or Eventbrite pages.

University and Innovation Hub Events

[IAAC Barcelona](#) · [Edinburgh College Fab Lab](#) · [Creative Spark Enterprise FabLab, Ireland](#)

European universities and innovation hubs hosting entrepreneurship evenings, prototype showcases, and innovation networking. The Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia anchors the European Fab Academy programme; Edinburgh College and Creative Spark in Dundalk run dedicated STEAM fab lab activity.

Maker Meet-Ups and Community Build Sessions

[FabLabs.io directory](#) · [Fab Foundation Global Community](#) · [Distributed Design Platform \(EU\)](#)

Searchable directories and platforms that help you find a build session or meet-up near you. Themes typically include sustainable design, robotics, Arduino projects, textile innovation, and circular economy repair cafes. The Distributed Design Platform is a Creative Europe-backed network linking maker communities across the continent.

Fab Festivals and Maker Faires

[Maker Faire Rome](#) · [Maker Faire Hannover](#) · [Maker Faire Germany network](#)

Maker Faire Rome (European Edition) is one of Europe's largest innovation festivals, drawing makers, startups, and researchers each October to the Gazometro Ostiense. Maker Faire Hannover runs every August at the Hannover Congress Centrum, with sister Faires across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Online Fab Lab Communities

[FabConnectHer MentHer](#) · [Fab Lab Network forums](#) · [LinkedIn STEAM groups](#)

The FabConnectHer MentHer Community is the project's own dedicated European mentoring space, connecting Fab Lab educators, makers, designers, and STEAM professionals supporting girls and women across the ecosystem. Complemented by wider forums on Fablabs.io, LinkedIn groups, and Discord maker servers. We will explore MentHer further later in this phase.



Traditional vs. digital networking

In-person events at a Fab Lab open evening or [Maker Faire Rome](#) build trust quickly and surface the hands-on expertise fabrication work depends on. Digital channels — [LinkedIn](#), [Fablabs.io](#), [Distributed Design EU](#) — extend that reach across borders and matter especially for women balancing caring responsibilities, working remotely, or in sectors where they remain under-represented at physical events. The strongest networkers combine both.



Leveraging networking tools and events

The value of any event lies in preparation, not attendance. Before a flagship event such as [Maker Faire Rome](#) or a [FAB conference](#), identify three to five specific people you want to meet and research their recent work. After the event, continue digitally: [LinkedIn](#) for visibility, [Fablabs.io](#) for technical exchange, and [FabConnectHer's MentHer](#) for sustained peer support. Two or three well-prepared events per year outperform a packed calendar.



The art of follow-up

A connection unfollowed-up is a connection lost. For women in fabrication and STEAM, where networks remain thinner than for male counterparts, follow-up is where the real network gets built. Some ideas

- Within 48 hours, send a short message referencing your specific conversation e.g. a question they raised, a resource you promised.
- Personalise LinkedIn invitations rather than using the default.
- Most importantly, treat your network as reciprocal: make introductions, share opportunities you have outgrown, recommend collaborators.

The women you support today become the partners and advocates of tomorrow.

Your Persona and Networking

There is no single right way to network, scale a business, or stay resilient through growth. Five distinct approaches show up consistently among women building STEAM ventures, each shaped by what drives the founder, how she works, and where she finds energy.

Innovators

Network like an innovator

Innovators network with intent. Every connection serves a specific purpose in turning an idea into a working venture, so the work begins with clarity about what you actually need.

1. Define what you need from your network

Be specific: a technical mentor, a co-founder, a first customer, a regulatory expert. Write three to five concrete networking goals before you reach out to anyone. “Find a mentor with experience in product certification” outperforms “build my network.”

2. Map your target contacts

List the people, organisations, and communities that match your specific goals — researchers in your field, EU-funded projects, sector clusters. Use [LinkedIn](#), [Fablabs.io](#), and the [Distributed Design EU](#) directory to identify who is actually active in your space.

3. Craft an introductory message that lands

Tailor every outreach. Lead with one specific reason you are contacting *this* person — a project of theirs you admire, a shared connection, a complementary skill. Close with a clear, small ask: a 20-minute call, advice on one decision, an introduction.

4. Build and maintain a network map

Visualise your connections in a tool like [Miro](#) or a simple sketchbook. Put yourself in the centre, contacts radiating out, with lines showing introductions you can broker. Review monthly to spot gaps and dormant relationships.

Guiding questions for your networking action plan

- Q1.** What three networking goals will you commit to this quarter?
- Q2.** Who are five specific people you need to meet to achieve them?
- Q3.** What is the single ask in your first message?
- Q4.** Which gap on your network map will you fill first?

Social Implementers

Building connections that matter

Social Implementers network around mission alignment. Your connections come from shared purpose — making a positive impact on people, communities, or causes — and that shared purpose is your strongest opening line.

1. Clarify the mission behind your networking

Write down the change you want to make in the world before you write down the people you want to meet. “Connect with women running social enterprises in rural Ireland” gives you a clear filter; “build a network” gives you noise.

2. Find your aligned allies

Look for nonprofits, social enterprises, community-based fab labs, and education networks whose values match yours.

[LinkedIn](#) groups for social innovation, [Social Economy Europe](#), and the [Ashoka network](#) are useful starting points alongside local enterprise centres.

3. Reach out with purpose, not pitch

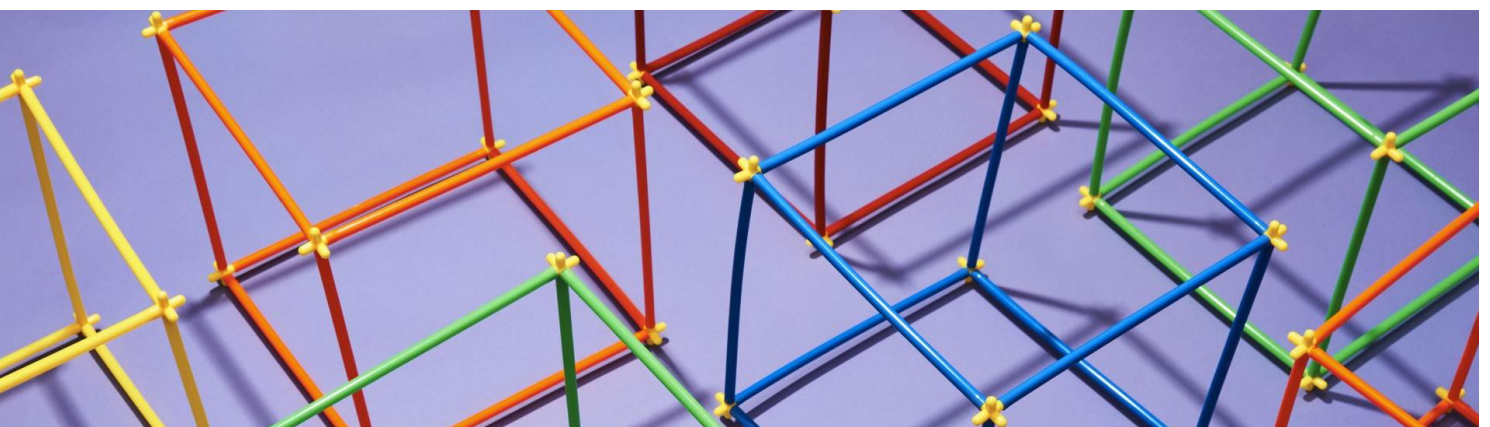
Lead with shared values, not your project. Reference a specific piece of work the person has done and explain why it resonates with your mission. Ask one open question rather than asking for help. Trust builds before transactions.

4. Engage in community spaces consistently

Attend local workshops, community fab lab open days, social enterprise meetups, and online communities such as the [FabConnectHer MentHer](#) Community. Showing up regularly is what turns acquaintances into collaborators — bring a friend if it helps.

Guiding questions for your networking action plan

- Q1.** What mission unites the network you want to build?
- Q2.** Which three organisations share your values most strongly?
- Q3.** How will you signal shared purpose in your first message?
- Q4.** Which community space will you commit to attending monthly?



Creative Makers

Crafting your network for impactful connections

Creative Makers network through their work. Connections form when others can see, touch, and respond to what you are building, so visibility and collaboration matter more than introductions.

1. Define your creative vision and what it needs

Identify what kind of collaborators would genuinely advance your work — a fabrication partner for a specific technique, a creative director for a campaign, a curator for an exhibition. Your goals should reflect what excites you creatively *and* where you need expertise.

2. Embed yourself in maker communities

Find local fab labs, makerspaces, and design studios where you can work alongside others. Use the [Fablabs.io](#) directory to find spaces nearby; check [Distributed Design EU](#) for collaborative residencies and open calls. Attend open workshops on techniques relevant to your work.

3. Show your work to attract collaborators

Build a simple portfolio and share it consistently. Use platforms like [Behance](#), Instagram, or [LinkedIn](#) to post process and outcomes — not just finished pieces. Bring prototypes to events. Visibility attracts collaboration far more reliably than cold outreach does.

4. Join collaborative challenges and group projects

Sign up for design sprints, hackathons, residencies, and shared community builds. These accelerate skill-building and put you in a room with the exact people you want to know. [Maker Faire Rome](#), Vienna Design Week, and the European Maker Week run open calls each year.

Guiding questions for your networking action plan

- Q1.** What is your creative vision and what does it need from a network?
- Q2.** Which two makerspaces or studios will you embed in?
- Q3.** How will you make your work visible and findable?
- Q4.** Which collaborative challenge will you commit to this year?

Explorers

Discovering your network for inspiration and opportunities

Explorers network through curiosity. You do not yet know exactly what you are looking for, and that is the point — your network exists to expose you to new ideas, people, and possibilities you could not have planned.

1. Follow your fascinations into communities

Identify the topics that genuinely pull you in — robotics, sustainable fashion, game development, biofabrication — and join the communities around them. Discord servers, subreddits, [LinkedIn](#) groups, and niche forums are low-pressure ways to listen before you speak.

2. Attend events that spark curiosity

Pick events for the questions they raise, not the contacts they offer. Open days at fab labs, university public lectures, [Maker Faire Hannover](#), and free webinars from EU projects let you sample fields without committing.

3. Find mentors and role models who intrigue you

Identify women whose careers you find interesting and follow their work for a while before you reach out. When you do, ask one specific question about how they got from where they were to where they are. Most people will answer that.

4. Join collaborative projects to learn by doing

Sign up for game jams, design challenges, citizen science projects, or open-source contributions. These give you skills, peers, and proof points all at once — far more useful than passively reading about a field. Many EU-funded projects run open calls for participants.

Guiding questions for your networking action plan

- Q1.** Which three topics genuinely fascinate you right now?
- Q2.** What is one event you will attend purely out of curiosity?
- Q3.** Who is one woman in your field whose path you would like to understand?
- Q4.** What is one collaborative project you could join this quarter?



Doers

Building practical networks and hands-on partnerships

Doers network through action. Your work is your introduction — connections form alongside shared tasks rather than over coffee, and your network grows from showing what you can do rather than describing it.

1. Show up where the work happens

Local fab lab open sessions, repair cafes, skill-shares, community fix-it days. These are environments where you can roll your sleeves up and contribute. Check your nearest fab lab on [Fablabs.io](https://fablabs.io), community noticeboards, and local social media for upcoming sessions.

2. Connect through doing, not introducing

Skip the small talk. Ask someone about their project, offer help with theirs, share what you are working on by *showing* it. Contact details exchanged after working alongside someone are far stickier than those swapped at a stand-up networking event.

3. Extend your network online through your work

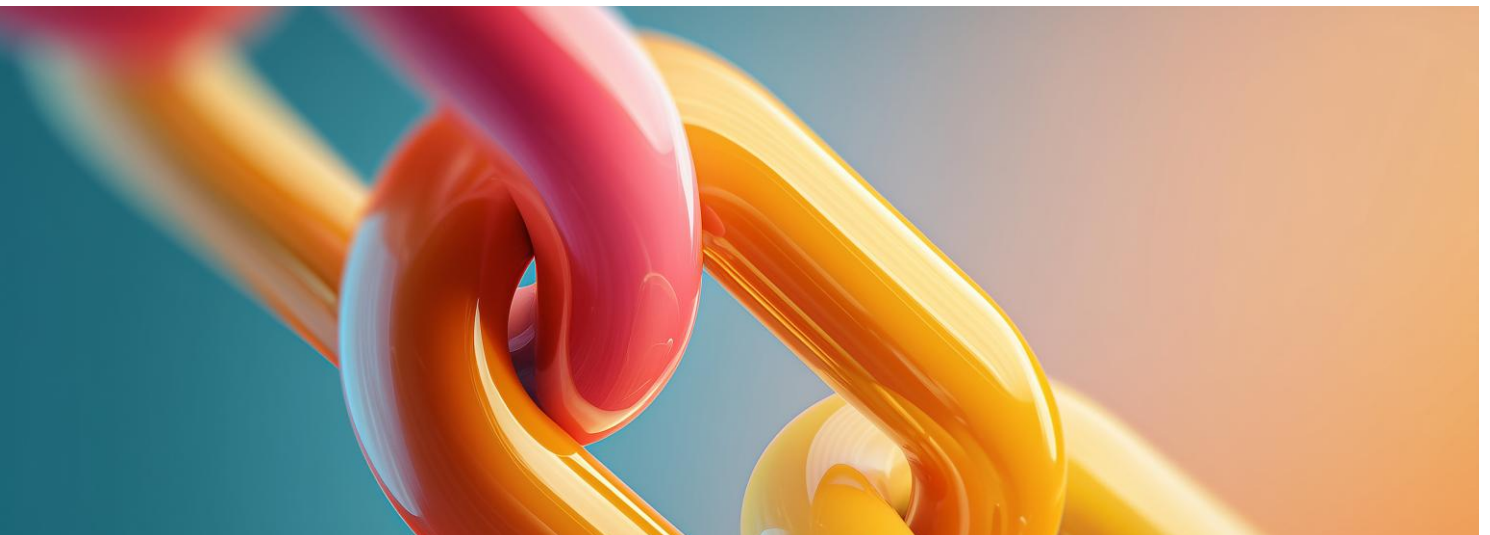
Post your projects and process on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com), specialist forums like Instructables, and maker communities on [Fablabs.io](https://fablabs.io). Comment on others' work with genuine technical questions. Doers attract Doers, and your output is your best calling card.

4. Keep your network active with a simple system

Track who you have met, what they do, and how you might collaborate — a basic spreadsheet is enough. Set a quarterly reminder to reconnect: send relevant work, share an opportunity, propose a small project. An unmaintained network goes cold within months.

Guiding questions for your networking action plan

- Q1.** Which three hands-on spaces will you embed in this quarter?
- Q2.** How will you contribute before you ask for anything?
- Q3.** Which online platform best matches your work and how will you use it?
- Q4.** What simple system will you use to keep contacts warm?



Your Networking Action Plan

Use this plan to translate the five personas into concrete networking moves over the next 30 days. Write your answers directly into each box. Revisit your plan at the end of the month and adjust based on what worked.

1. My dominant persona is:

Plus the two specific traits I most identify with from that persona's framework.

2. One thing I will work on that is outside my comfort zone:

3. Three networking actions I will take in the next 30 days:

Drawn from my dominant persona's four-action framework. Be specific about what, when, and how.

4. One specific person, organisation, or event I will reach out to this week:

Name, why this contact matters to my goals, and the single ask in my first message.

Share your progress and learn from other women in STEAM through the [FabConnectHer MentHer Community](#).

Unit 13

RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND SCALING YOUR BUSINESS

Future Female Innovators In STEAM



Resilience, Growth and Scaling Your Business

If ever there was a word that is overused it is the word resilient. Perhaps it is the connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Those ears of being told that resilience was what we needed, what we showed, what we should aspire to, until the word itself started to lose its shape. It got attached to everything: supply chains, mental health, economies, children, communities, ourselves. By the end of it, calling something resilient often meant little more than calling it tired but still standing!

Resilience, when you take the word back from the slogans, is something specific and useful. It is

- the practiced capacity to recover from setbacks without losing direction, to adapt when conditions change without abandoning what matters, to keep making sound decisions when energy is low and pressure is high.
- built through habits.
- a working tool for women scaling STEAM businesses through a stage where the founder's own capacity is often the limiting factor and where the cost of running out of it is measured in poor decisions, fractured teams, and abandoned ventures.

The work in this unit treats resilience as that working tool. Practical, observable, learnable. Resilience is what sustains you through this transition.

It is the capacity to adapt when the market shifts, to recover from setbacks without losing direction, and to protect your wellbeing through the long arc of scaling.

For women founders in STEAM, who often build with less capital, smaller networks, and more interruption than their male counterpart, resilience is the operational foundation that makes scaling possible at all.

By the end of this unit, you will understand how to:

- apply a growth mindset to setbacks, treating each failed experiment as information you can use rather than a verdict on your ability — the reframe that protects decision quality through the long arc of scaling.
- Design scaling moves as structured experiments, using frameworks like Three Horizons and ICE prioritisation to choose which growth bets to make, and in which order.
- Build a setback protocol and a personal resilience routine of concrete daily and weekly practices, including deep work time and creative practice, that keep your energy and judgment sharp through periods of rapid change.
- Build peer infrastructure deliberately of cohort programmes, advisory circles, and pan-European networks for women founders that turn isolated scaling into shared scaling.

What resilience actually is

Resilience is the practiced capacity to recover from setbacks, adapt to changed circumstances, and continue making sound decisions under pressure. Research from psychologists including [Angela Duckworth](#) and [Carol Dweck](#) shows that resilience is built through specific habits of reflection, support-seeking, deliberate rest, and learning from each experience. These are habits we can develop with practice, regardless of where they start.

Why a growth mindset matters more than confidence

The growth mindset, Carol Dweck's framing of abilities as developable through effort rather than fixed at birth, is what allows entrepreneurs to treat failure as data rather than verdict. Confidence rises and falls; a growth mindset is more durable because it reframes setbacks as information. For women founders, who often face structural underestimation, this reframe is particularly protective.

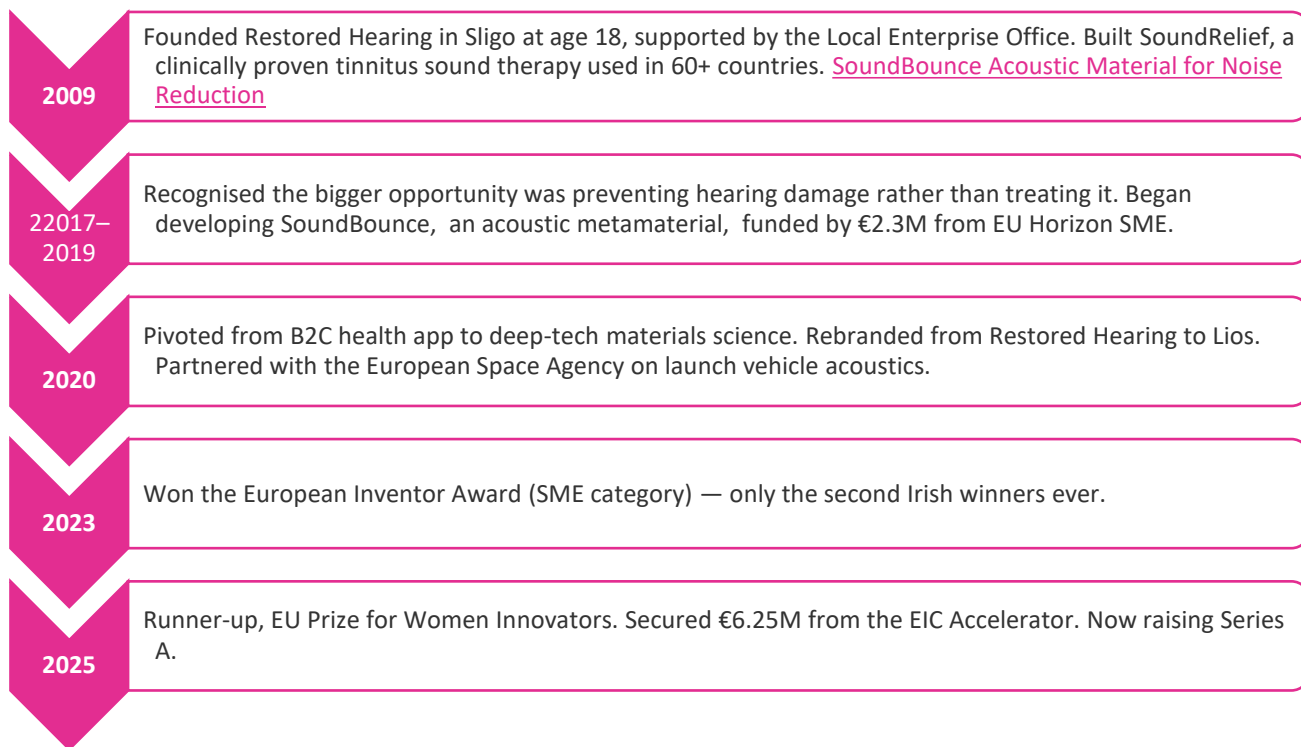
The cost of ignoring emotional resilience

Founder burnout has measurable consequences: poor decisions, fractured relationships, abandoned ventures. The risk is highest at the growth stage, where founder energy is the limiting factor. The practices in this unit. boundary-setting, peer support, structured reflection, keep decision sharp, relationships strong, and ventures on course through the longest stretch of the entrepreneurial journey. They are operational requirements for sustainable scaling.

Case study: Rhona Togher and Lios

From an Irish bedroom to the European Space Agency — 15-years of resilience

Two physicists from Co. Sligo built a business at 18 that took 15 years scale. Their story shows every theme of this unit. Setbacks turned into pivots, a growth mindset applied to an entire industry, and peer infrastructure used deliberately at every stage.



Read more: [EIC Coffee Break interview](#) · [Rhona's EIC advice](#) · [The Lios rebrand story](#)

What this case study teaches

Growth mindset in practice

Their early consumer health app worked, but they treated 11 years of B2C work as data to glean information about where the bigger opportunity actually was. The pivot to materials science is the growth mindset applied at the level of business strategy.

Scaling moves as structured experiments

The Lios rebrand and ESA partnership were not panic moves. They followed years of R&D, validated by Horizon SME funding and third-party testing. Slow, deliberate, evidence-led.

EU peer infrastructure as scaffolding

Local Enterprise Office → Horizon → ESA → European Patent Office → EIC. Every stage of growth used a different European support programme. The ecosystem is real and reachable.

Sharing what you learned

Rhona writes “what I wish I had known” articles publicly for the next generation of EIC applicants. A growth mindset turns your setbacks into other founders’ shortcuts.

Two more resilience stories from Europe

Yuliia Bialetska and María González Manso

Two more women, two more EU recognitions, two very different scaling stories. Both won at the 2024 European Prize for Women Innovators.

S.lab, Ukraine [About company - S.Lab](#) — EIT Women Leadership Winner 2024



READ: [Yuliia interview \(Mezha\)](#)

Yuliia Bialetska and her husband Yevhen Tomilin saw a Bali beach buried in plastic in 2017. They went home to Ukraine, researched mushroom mycelium and hemp-stalk biocomposites, and founded S.lab in 2020.

It specialises in producing 100% biodegradable packaging that decomposes in soil within 30 days. They invested \$40-50,000 of personal savings to launch. They were scaling into the European market when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Then in 2022 they were scaling through a full-scale war in their home country. They kept going.

- By 2023 they had closed a €700,000 pre-seed round (Vesna Capital, ZAS Ventures, Techstars).
- In 2024 they won the EIT Women Leadership Award. In 2025 they secured a further £250,000 from Morgan Stanley

They are now building modular mini-factories which are production lines in shipping containers that customers can deploy directly at their own sites.

What this teaches:

Resilience at the operational level. Yuliia and Yevhen treated war, pandemic, supply-chain breakdown, and capital scarcity as conditions to design around, not reasons to stop.

The modular factory concept is itself a resilience strategy — if you cannot ship globally, build locally.

tucuvi, Spain — EIC Rising Innovators Winner 2024



READ: [María's EIT Health story](#)

María González Manso is CEO and co-founder of **tucuvi**, a Spanish health-tech startup that built an empathetic AI voice assistant for clinical follow-up consultations.

Patients receive scheduled phone calls; the AI listens, asks the right questions, flags concerns, and feeds structured data back to clinicians.

The technology is clinically validated and CE-marked as a medical device. She built **tucuvi** while still in her 20s. EIT Health programmes supported her at every stage, most recently the Bridgehead programme, which helped **tucuvi** do a soft landing in the US.

At the 2024 ceremony in Brussels, she won the Rising Innovators category for founders under 35, with a €50,000 prize. **tucuvi** now operates across multiple European hospital systems.

What this teaches:

Peer infrastructure used early and often. María scaled her company inside the EIT Health ecosystem, applying for programme after programme as her business matured.

Read more: [Both stories at the EU Commission](#)

Designing your scaling moves

Scaling well means treating each growth move as a deliberate test with a defined outcome, a realistic timeline, and the resources it genuinely needs. The skill is choosing which moves to make in which order and resourcing them with the honesty most founders apply only in hindsight.

1. Map your growth options

Most women in STEAM scaling a business have more ideas than time. Sketch a simple grid on paper: list four or five possible next moves — opening a second product line, taking on a new partnership, expanding into a neighbouring market, scaling production through a Fab Lab network, hiring your first employee.

For each one, note how much it could grow the business, and how much it would cost you to test it on a small scale first.

Try the **Three Horizons model**

- **Horizon 1** (defend what's working today, next 12 months),
- **Horizon 2** (new opportunities you're piloting, 1–3 years),
- **Horizon 3** (longer-term bets, 3+ years). Allocate roughly 70% / 20% / 10% of your time and money across the three. Keeps the long bets alive while protecting the work that pays today.

2. Choose what to do next

Most growth plans fail because the founder tries to do everything at once. Three simple questions cut the list down:

- How much would this actually move the business? How sure am I that it will work?
- How quickly and cheaply can I test it?

Score each idea out of ten on each question. The ones that score highest are the ones to start with, and the ones that score low on the second question are the ones you need to test before committing real money.

Try this: When you sit down to score each option honestly, the high-impact ideas often score low on certainty. That's not a reason to drop them. It's a signal that they need a small, cheap test first. A weekend prototype in your local Fab Lab, a conversation with three potential customers, a one-page proposal sent to a possible partner. Test the riskiest assumption first.

3. Plan scaling with realistic timelines

Most growth plans fail on timeline, not strategy. Build a 12-month scaling plan with three columns: **action**, **realistic timeline** (then double it), and the specific resource — time, money, or person — required.

Tools like **Notion** or **Trello** make it easy to maintain.

Reality check: Hiring a senior developer takes roughly 3 months to find, 2 months notice period, 4 months to genuine productivity. That is 9 months minimum from decision to impact, not the “Q2” most plans assume.

4. Visualise your plan

A scaling plan that lives in a slide deck gets opened once a quarter. A scaling plan that lives where you work gets used. Build yours visually — on a wall, in a sketchbook, or on a tool like **Miro** — so you can see the full year at a glance and revise it physically every month.

Try this: Map where the business is now in the centre, where you want it in twelve months at the edge, and the specific moves between them. Use sketches, swatches, photos, or sticky notes. Revising it as a physical object beats revising it as a document.

When is the right time to scale? The honest answer is that there is no perfect moment, but there are reliable signals:

1. **Demand that you cannot meet on your own.** Not occasional spikes, but a steady pattern of enquiries, orders, or partnership requests outpacing your current capacity. If you are turning work away or stretching beyond comfort for several months in a row, the market is telling you something.
2. **Your product or service and system works reliably.** Scaling magnifies whatever you have built — including its flaws. If your current customers are happy, the quality is consistent, and you can describe clearly why people choose you over alternatives, the foundation is sound. If you are still firefighting basic delivery, it is not the right time to scale.
3. **Your own capacity to lead through change.** Scaling is operationally demanding and personally tiring. Honest questions to ask yourself: do you have the energy, the support network, and the financial buffer to navigate 12 to 18 months of increased pressure? If two of the three are missing, it is the time to strengthen them rather than push forward.

When all three signals are present, the question shifts from *whether* to *how* and the rest of this unit is designed to help you answer it well

Building setback infrastructure

Design the support system before you need it

Every scaling business hits setbacks such as failed launches, lost contracts, key hires leaving, market shifts. The founders who recover fastest are the ones who designed their response in advance, while energy and clarity were still high. The protocol is your infrastructure for the days when those resources are scarce.

1. Write a one-page setback protocol

A simple document, written now, that tells you what to do when something goes wrong. Three named people you will call (a mentor, a peer founder, a friend outside the business). Good ideas

- A 24-hour decision-deferral rule — no major calls in the first day after bad news.
- A scheduled “cold review” on day three where you look at the numbers without emotion.
- A return-to-work cue: a specific small task you can complete to rebuild momentum.

Template: Print it. Put it where you can find it. The protocol works because it removes the need to make decisions about how to respond when your decision-making is most compromised.

2. Build a mission-resilience advisory circle

Three to five people who will tell you the truth when your business or your wellbeing starts to drift. Not investors, not board members, people who care more about the work than the company. A values-aligned mentor, a founder who has been through similar pressure, a community elder. Schedule honest conversations with them quarterly.

Quarterly truth-telling questions: Ask each member the same four questions every quarter, in writing if possible. Where do you see me drifting? Which decisions of the last quarter would you have made differently? What am I ignoring that you think matters? What is the bravest thing I could do in the next 90 days?

3. Build a growth mindset around setbacks

Carol Dweck’s [growth mindset](#) reframes setbacks as information. The practice is to ask three questions of every failed experiment: What did this teach me about the market, the product, or myself? What would I do differently next time? What is the smallest next test I can run?

Try this: Keep a setback log. One paragraph per significant setback, written the day after. Re-read it at the end of each quarter. The pattern of what you learned across setbacks is more valuable than any single insight from any single one.

4. Plan deliberate recovery time after major efforts

Recovery is operational work. After a product launch, a fundraiser, or a major hire, schedule explicit recovery time. Two days off, a week of lighter load, a weekend without screens. Block it in your calendar before the effort starts.

Reality check: Founders who skip recovery accumulate cognitive debt. Decisions get slower, judgment gets cloudier. Treat recovery as part of the work, scheduled with the same discipline you apply to client deadlines.

Have a think..

- Who are the three people in your advisory circle?
- What did your last setback teach you, and what was the smallest next test?
- Where in your calendar is your next deliberate recovery window?

Protecting your energy and focus

Build the daily and weekly practices that keep decisions sharp

Scaling demands more of you than launching did. The practices that protect your energy and focus through that demand are the operational layer that keeps everything else working. The goal is reliability: practices small enough to keep on the hardest days, consistent enough to compound over months.



1. Establish 3 resilience routines you can keep on bad days

Pick three small, daily or weekly practices you can sustain when motivation drops e.g. a morning planning session, a regular walk, a Friday review with a peer. Schedule them as fixed appointments. Commit for four weeks before judging.

Try this: Use BJ Fogg's [Tiny Habits method](#) — anchor each new routine to an existing behaviour. "After I make my morning coffee, I will write three priorities for the day." Habit-stacking onto existing routines has a far higher 30-day completion rate than free-floating new habits

2. Reserve weekly time for deep work

Schedule one 90-minute block per week of uninterrupted focus on the most important strategic question your business is facing. No email, no phone, no operational tasks. Cal Newport's research on [deep work](#) shows that this kind of concentration produces strategic clarity and creative breakthroughs that operational hours cannot deliver.

Try this: Block the same 90 minutes every week at the same day, same time. Treat it as a meeting with yourself that cannot be moved. The consistency matters more than the duration; a regular short block beats an irregular long one.

3. Build creative practice to your week

Creativity is itself a resilience tool when channelled deliberately. Reserve at least 30 minutes per week for making something unrelated to your business — sketching, building, coding, crafting, gardening, music. It restores cognitive resources scaling depletes and protects the creative energy that built your business in the first place.

Try this: Visit your local [Fab Lab or maker space](#) for a regular open evening. Many run weekly sessions specifically welcoming newcomers. Making something tangible, outside the business, alongside other women in STEAM, is restorative in a way that screen-based hobbies rarely match.

4. Track your energy as honestly as you track your numbers

A simple weekly check-in: rate your energy, focus, and motivation on a 1-10 scale. Note what restored you that week, and what depleted you. Over three months you will see patterns — which meetings, which projects, which times of day consistently feed or drain you. Use the pattern to restructure your calendar.

Template: A single Notion page or paper notebook is enough. Five minutes every Friday afternoon. The point is the pattern across weeks, not the score in any single one.

Take action

- Q1.** Which three resilience routines will you commit to for four weeks?
- Q2.** When is your weekly deep-work block, and what cannot move it?
- Q3.** What creative practice will you build into your week?
- Q4.** Where will you track your energy alongside your numbers?

Building peer infrastructure

The network around you determines how far you can go

Scaling alongside peers, mentors, and structured programmes is easier than scaling alone. The most successful women founders in STEAM build deliberate peer infrastructure early — designing it in advance so it is there when they need it. Europe has a richer landscape of programmes for women founders than most people realise.

1. Apply for a cohort-based growth programme

Cohort programmes give you peers facing the same scaling problems at the same time. Explore national programmes across EU member states via [WEgate](#). The [EU Prize for Women Innovators](#) network is another route into a Europe-wide peer ecosystem.

What to look for:

- 8-15 founders.
- 6-12 months minimum duration.
- Peer selectivity — every member at a similar stage. Confidential by default
- The cohort is often more valuable than the curriculum.

2. Find a structured accelerator or peer learning environment

Beyond growth programmes, accelerators give you scheduled commitments and challenge alongside support. The [EIT Climate-KIC accelerator](#) runs 6-month cohorts for climate-tech founders. The [Female Founders programme](#) (Vienna-based, pan-EU) runs accelerator cohorts specifically for women-led ventures. Both have annual admission windows.

Try this: Set a calendar reminder for two months before each programme's next intake. Use the lead time to prepare a strong application rather than rushing one together at the deadline.

3. Build a mission-driven peer network

For founders building social or environmental impact alongside commercial success, mission-aligned networks add a layer general business networks cannot. Engage with [Social Economy Europe](#), [Ashoka Changemaker Europe](#), the [Euclid Network](#), and [EVPA / Impact Europe](#).

Try this: A monthly peer call with one other mission-driven founder beats a thousand LinkedIn connections. Pick one network, attend one event, ask one person for a 30-minute call.

4. Join the FabConnectHer MentHer Community

The closest peer infrastructure to this learning pathway is FabConnectHer's own [MentHer Community](#) — a dedicated European mentoring space connecting Fab Lab educators, makers, designers, and STEAM professionals supporting girls and women across the ecosystem. The Community continues beyond Phase 4 and is designed for women in STEAM at every stage.

How to start: Browse the Tools and Activities bank, get a sense of who is active. Then introduce yourself with a specific question or contribution. Sustained light engagement beats burst-then-disappear.

Take action

- Q1.** Which cohort or accelerator could you apply to this year, and when is the intake window?
- Q2.** Which one peer network most closely matches your business?
- Q3.** Who are three women founders you want as your peer circle, and what is the smallest first step toward that?
- Q4.** What will you give back to the communities you join?



Track what matters

Three metrics, watched weekly, beat thirty metrics watched annually

When growing and scaling, there can be too many numbers on which to base growth decisions. Consider the discipline of choosing three numbers that genuinely tell you whether the business is healthy and watching them weekly. It is more valuable than any dashboard with thirty. The skill is choosing the right three for your stage.

1. Pick three business metrics that matter at your stage

Three numbers, no more. They vary by stage but commonly include weekly sales, customer enquiries, and cash position. Use a simple spreadsheet or a tool like [Notion](#). Review weekly. Trends matter more than single data points.

Try this: Distinguish leading from lagging indicators. Revenue is lagging (it tells you what already happened). Weekly new customer enquiries is leading (it predicts revenue 30-60 days out). Pick one leading indicator, one efficiency indicator, one outcome indicator.

2. Define impact metrics alongside business metrics

For mission-driven businesses, the business numbers alone tell half the story. Set three to five impact metrics — people reached, environmental outcomes, community engagement — and track them with the same discipline you track revenue. The [IRIS+ metrics catalogue](#) from the Global Impact Investing Network is the most widely-used standard.

Try this: Pick three IRIS+ metrics that map to your mission. This gives you credibility with funders and a common language with other mission-driven founders. Track quarterly at minimum.

3. Document the processes only you currently know

The biggest scaling constraint for many founders is that they hold the business in their head. Spend one hour per week writing down a single process — how you onboard a customer, how you fulfil an order, how you respond to a complaint. After ten weeks you will have a manual someone else can follow.

Practical template: Open a free [Loom](#) account. Screen-record yourself doing the process while talking through it — 5-10 minutes is plenty. Pair the video with a one-page checklist in a Google Doc or Notion page. Total time per process: 20 minutes. A new hire can be productive on these in days rather than months.

4. Review your metrics with someone who will challenge you

Numbers reviewed alone are easier to rationalise than numbers reviewed with a peer. Schedule a monthly metrics review with one trusted founder, mentor, or advisor. This is someone who will ask the uncomfortable questions about why a number moved, what you tried, and what you would try differently.

Try this: A 30-minute monthly call works. Send the numbers in advance with a one-paragraph commentary on what you think they mean. Use the call to test your interpretation, not to present it. The challenges you receive are the data the numbers alone cannot give you.

Take action

- Q1.** What are your three business metrics, and which is leading vs lagging?
- Q2.** Which impact metrics will you track if your business has a mission?
- Q3.** Which process living only in your head will you document first?
- Q4.** Who will you review your metrics with monthly?

Your Resilience and Scaling Action Plan

Use this plan to translate the resilience and scaling work into concrete commitments over the next 30 days. Write your answers directly into each box. Revisit at the end of the month and revise as the business and your circumstances change.

1. My growth move for the next 30 days is:

One specific first step toward a scaling move from this unit. Name what it is, the single concrete output you will produce, and the most important thing that needs to be true for it to succeed.

2. My resilience practice will be:

One concrete practice I will commit to for at least four weeks. Specify when, how often, and what success looks like — “weekly Friday review” not “be more reflective.”

3. The biggest risk to my scaling is:

An honest assessment — finance, founder capacity, market shift, mission drift, or something else. Name what would derail your growth and one specific thing you will do this quarter to reduce that risk.

4. One person who will hold me accountable:

Name them, the conversation cadence you will commit to with them, and what specifically you will ask them to challenge you on. A vague “mentor” rarely works, you have to be specific.

Unit 14

BENEFIT FROM OTHER FABCONNECTHER RESOURCES

Future Female Innovators In STEAM



Benefit more from FabConnectHer

This final unit shows you how to keep engaging with FabConnectHer after the formal learning ends. The resources are openly licensed, freely accessible, and designed for women at every stage of the STEAM entrepreneurial journey and are specifically relevant to learners extending their skills, a mentor supporting others, an educator delivering inclusive STEAM, or a Fab Lab leader building community.

Connect with the MentHer Community [FAB Connect MentHER - FabConnectHer.eu](https://FabConnectHer.eu)



FABCONNECT MENTHER COMMUNITY

Mentoring has the power to transform. A conversation, a connection, a shared experiences. These are the moments that open doors, build confidence and change the direction of a girl's and woman's path in STEAM.

MentHer is FabConnectHer's dedicated mentoring connection space, bringing together the resources, tools and community that mentors need to make those moments happen. Everything in one place, from expert mentor support to hands-on activities to a growing European community of mentors lifting others higher in STEAM via FabLabs and Makerspaces.

01 Mentor Resource Hub

Guides, templates, reflection questions and workshop ideas that you can adapt for your mentees. Access the full FabConnectHer mentoring toolkit and select the tools most useful for your practice.

- Mentoring guides and session plans
- Reflection questions and templates
- Workshop ideas ready to adapt

02 Tools & Activities Resource

Hands-on activities designed to support mentoring in Fab Lab and maker environments. Plan activities, explore new approaches and broaden your impact with practical, tested resources.

- Hands-on Fab Lab mentoring activities
- Practical tools for planning sessions
- Approaches for all experience levels

03 MentHer Community

Your community space as a FabConnectHer mentor. Connect with peers, share experience, learn from others and build confidence in your mentoring practice.

- Mentor profiles across European Fab Labs
- Topic-based forums and peer support
- Events, meetups and collaboration opportunities

Learning pathways and tool guides

The skills layer of FabConnectHer. Two openly licensed resource banks designed to take you from idea to working prototype — whether you are learning, teaching, or both.

1. Choose a learning pathway that fits your stage

Three pathways available: primary, secondary, and adult. Each has 10+ structured lessons that combine a STEAM concept with a digital fabrication output. If you completed Phase 4 as an adult learner, the adult pathway extends into deeper specialist content. If you teach, the primary and secondary pathways are classroom-ready. [Browse pathways on fabconnecther.eu](#).

Stage signals: If you are still building confidence, start with the secondary pathway and work through three lessons before judging. If you have built basic prototypes already, go straight to the adult pathway. If you teach or mentor, work through the pathway your learners would use. The empathy you build is the best preparation.

2. Build hands-on tool confidence

Tool guides cover the core Fab Lab equipment: laser cutting, 3D printing, CNC machining, and more. Each guide is written for someone with no prior technical background — building familiarity step by step. The best way to use them is alongside a local Fab Lab session rather than from a desk.

Try this sequence: Pick the one tool guide that frightens you most. Read it once at your desk. Then book a Fab Lab session and bring the printed guide. Ask the staff or another maker to talk you through the first cut, print, or routing pass. Most Fab Labs welcome this — it is what the open evenings exist for. Confidence with one intimidating tool transfers to confidence with the others.

3. Find a Fab Lab near you

The European directory of gender-equality-focused Fab Labs and maker spaces is the first of its kind in Europe. Many spaces run open evenings and welcome-sessions for newcomers — visit [fabconnecther.eu/fab-labs-maker-spaces](#) to find your closest space. Walking into one is the single highest-impact step after Phase 4.

What to do on your first visit: Most Fab Labs run a free orientation or open evening. Aim for this rather than a full project session. Observe what others are making, ask what tools the lab has, look at the noticeboard for upcoming workshops. By the end of one visit you will know whether this is your space and what the cost and access model is for becoming a regular member.

4. Connect to the wider maker world

FabConnectHer is part of a wider European maker ecosystem. The [Fablabs.io](#) global directory lists 1,800+ Fab Labs worldwide, and the [Distributed Design EU](#) platform runs regular open calls for collaborative making projects. Both extend the network FabConnectHer has built for you.

Where to look first: Subscribe to the Distributed Design EU newsletter — they email monthly open calls and residency announcements. Set a calendar reminder to scroll the Fablabs.io project gallery once a month for inspiration. Most importantly, follow three or four Fab Labs in different European countries on Instagram. Seeing what other women in STEAM are making across borders is the easiest, lowest-friction way to feel part of a network.

5. Become a project partner or collaborator

The [partners page](#) lists the FabConnectHer partners. Please don't be a stranger. Get it touch.



You have reached the end of Phase 4 and the end of the FabConnectHer learning pathway.

What you have built across these four phases is real. Take what serves you. Adapt what needs adapting. Leave what doesn't fit. Every woman who has built a STEAM business has built it her own way, and yours will be no different.

Stay in touch with the FabConnectHer community as you go. Share what you learn. Reach back to support the women coming after you, the way others reached back to support you.



We wish you every success on the road ahead.

Build well, scale wisely, and look after yourself along the way.

The world needs what you are building.

Follow our journey



www.fabconnecther.eu