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FOUNDER INSIGHTS REPORT

Deeptech Roadshow 2026

Insights from four private CEO dinners on the Future of Compute & Energy Tech verticals in the Netherlands.

JUNE 2026

OVERVIEW

About this report

This report synthesises insights gathered across four private, invitation-only CEO dinners held as part of Techleap's Deeptech Roadshow in Q1–Q2 2026. Conducted under Chatham House Rules, the sessions convened deeptech founders and CEOs from across the Netherlands, co-hosted by the Future of Compute and Energy Vertical Leads, to surface structural scaling barriers and identify where Techleap can provide targeted, high-leverage impact.

40+
Founders & CEOs convened

4
Private CEO dinners

2
Verticals: Compute & Energy

150+
Ventures in the 2026 agenda

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All sessions were conducted under **Chatham House Rules**. No participating companies are identified individually in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four constraints stand between Dutch deeptech and global scale

The Roadshow's four CEO dinners surfaced structural scaling barriers that founders rarely voice in public forums. Four cross-cutting themes emerged consistently across all sessions:

Energy infrastructure

Energy infrastructure is the binding constraint for both the Future of Compute and Energy verticals, with grid access and affordable power cited as existential scaling challenges.

The hidden cost of subsidies

Subsidy dependency poses a hidden cost — founders across multiple sessions challenged the true value of public grants once time, reporting burden, and technology roadmap rigidity are factored in.

Ecosystem friction

Ecosystem intermediaries generate friction rather than flow in some cases, with founders expressing frustration at the cost and competitive behaviour of certain publicly funded institutions.

Narrative & branding

Narrative and branding matter for corporate engagement — the 'startup' label can be a barrier with large corporate buyers who perceive early-stage companies as unreliable suppliers.

Participants expressed a strong appetite for coordinated action that combines policy advocacy, ecosystem convening, and practical support instruments. The findings point to clear opportunities for Techleap to sharpen its narrative, convene critical stakeholders around grid and electricity bottlenecks, professionalise guidance on funding and IP, and map and improve access to fabrication and lab infrastructure.

This effort aligns with Techleap's 2026 deeptech and spin-off agenda, which emphasises vertical programmes in energy and compute and improved scaling conditions for more than 150 ventures.

01 SECTION Context & Format

1.1 Purpose of the Roadshow

As Techleap develops and strengthens its Deeptech and Ecosystem programme, the Deeptech Roadshow was conceived as a structured listening exercise to complement previous reports and existing programmes. As Techleap scales its vertical coverage from one to four active programmes in 2026, intervention design must be grounded in direct, unfiltered founder experience.

The dinner format — small, invitation-only, Chatham House Rules, and privately hosted — was deliberately chosen to create the psychological safety required for candid disclosure of challenges that founders rarely voice in public forums.

The dual focus on Future of Compute and Energy Tech reflects the strategic complementarity between the two verticals: both are infrastructure-intensive, capital-heavy, and critically dependent on the same scarce national resources — electricity, fabrication access, and specialised talent.

FORMAT

Small · invitation-only · Chatham House Rules · privately hosted — designed for candour.

SCOPE

Two complementary verticals — Future of Compute and Energy Tech — sharing the same scarce national resources.

SCALE-UP

Techleap's vertical coverage grows from one to four active programmes in 2026.

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SECTION 02

02

Cross-Cutting Themes

The most structurally significant findings from the Roadshow — systemic issues that require coordinated responses beyond any single intervention.

2.1 Energy Infrastructure as a Binding Constraint

Electricity availability was raised as the single most acute operational barrier to scaling deeptech companies in the Netherlands.

Founders highlighted two distinct but interrelated problems:

Grid connection backlogs. The inability to secure sufficient and timely grid access in the Netherlands is delaying facility expansion, production scale-up, and data centre build-out. This affects both compute-intensive operations — which require stable, high-density power supply — and energy companies commissioning new infrastructure.

European electricity cost competitiveness. Founders noted Europe's structural electricity cost disadvantage relative to the US and Asia. Affordable and abundant electricity is described as a foundational prerequisite for both verticals to compete globally — not merely a nice-to-have.

Founders frame this not as a business problem to be solved independently, but as a **systemic market failure requiring policy-level intervention**. Techleap is seen as a credible actor to surface this at the Ministry level.

2.2 The Hidden Cost of Subsidies

A strikingly consistent theme was a nuanced reassessment of subsidy dependency. While grant funding is widely used across the ecosystem, several founders questioned whether subsidies are truly 'free money' once the full cost is properly accounted for:

Time to acquire

Proposal writing, consortium formation and applications absorb significant management bandwidth in lean early-growth teams.

Reporting burden

Ongoing monitoring, reporting and audit requirements consume resources disproportionate to the size of many grants.

Roadmap rigidity

Grant conditions lock companies into predefined directions, which could be damaging to early-stage propositions that often require pivots.

Forced partnerships

Consortium requirements oblige companies to work with partners chosen for eligibility rather than strategic fit.

It is concerning when companies treat subsidies as a business model rather than a tool, creating distorted incentives and unhealthy dependency. There is space for Techleap to facilitate a more honest conversation — helping founders adopt a more selective approach to public funding, and advocating for grant criteria that assess company dynamics and business viability rather than sustaining ventures with limited commercial potential.

2.3 Friction with Publicly Funded Institutions

Founders raised substantive concerns about their experience with the research ecosystem. The issues cited were:

High cost of engagement: The cost of accessing expertise and facilities is seen as prohibitive, particularly for early-growth companies that cannot absorb large fee-for-service arrangements. This reflects a structural tension rather than a deliberate choice - research institutions operate under significant cost pressures and must recover expenses across a myriad of projects and funding streams, which can make commercial engagement with startups difficult to price accessibly.

Misaligned incentives around IP and spin-offs: Founders raised concerns about instances where commerically promising results from collaborative projects have led to internal spin-off ventures within research institutions - in some cases, appearing to compete with the companies that orginated the work. This points to a structural misalignment of incentives and erodes trust.

Concentration of access: Some founders noted a perception that certain institutions have come to occupy central roles as access points in particular technology domains. While this can reflect genuine expertise, it can also create bottlenecks - particularly where alternative pathways are limited and engagement terms are not easily negotiated.

Founders value access to world-class research infrastructure and expertise, but want relationships structured around genuine partnership rather than transactional or extractive dynamics.

2.4 Narrative & Branding in Corporate Engagement

A practical but underappreciated barrier to corporate partnership surfaced across sessions: the 'startup' label itself. Large corporate buyers — including the industrial anchors strategically important to the Dutch Future of Compute ecosystem — often perceive startups as unreliable suppliers due to concerns about financial stability, delivery consistency, and long-term viability.

This creates a structural disadvantage in procurement and pilot partnership discussions that is independent of technical quality. Founders suggested that reframing how companies are positioned in corporate contexts — emphasising strategic capability, IP maturity, and ecosystem credibility rather than stage and age — could meaningfully improve conversion.

2.5 Access to Specialised Fabrication & Lab Infrastructure

Access to specialised fabs, cleanrooms, labs, and photonics or quantum infrastructure emerged as a key enabler and constraint. Participants highlighted that the Netherlands hosts high-quality facilities, but that access conditions, pricing, and capacity allocation are not always transparent or optimally aligned with the needs of young companies.

There was strong interest in a coordinated mapping of which facilities — university, national, or semi-public — are available, under what conditions, and how deeptech ventures can engage without being crowded out by academic priorities. Participants also expressed a desire for more systematic engagement with national nanofabrication and related infrastructures, rather than purely ad hoc, relationship-driven access.

The expressed need for better visibility points to a **concrete, actionable intervention**: a structured mapping of critical facilities, capacity gaps, and access barriers — and dedicated access windows for scaling ventures.

03 SECTION Other Topics Raised

1. The perception of the Netherlands as a **knowledge hub and technology-license hub** for markets such as the USA and the Middle East.

2. Deeptech scale-ups in **energy storage** need support for national procurement and patient private capital to set up production capacity in the Netherlands or Europe.

3. **Focused public funding** — provided only to top strategic technologies, to bet on high potentials and concentrate financial resources, across the Netherlands and wider Europe.

4. **Procurement priority for 'made in Europe'.** Several ventures noted that tender competitiveness is undermined by non-European competitors, urging the Dutch government and the European Commission to prioritise European suppliers.

5. Specific challenges in **photonics and quantum** development, including complex convertible funding structures tied to ecosystem platforms and the difficulty of negotiating balanced IP terms.

6. **Governance and equity compensation** — specifically stock appreciation rights — where founders would benefit from structured peer exchange and expert guidance.

SECTION

04 Opportunities for the Ecosystem

Concrete opportunities where coordinated action — from founders, investors, corporates, research institutions, and policymakers — could meaningfully shift conditions for Dutch deeptech scaling.

4.1 Sharpening the narrative around deeptech

The repeated emphasis on narrative signals an ecosystem-wide need to reshape how deeptech entrepreneurship is perceived in the Netherlands. This includes positioning deeptech ventures as credible, long-term partners for corporates and government, highlighting success stories, and reframing risk-taking as a necessary component of national strategic resilience.

Aligning communication across the Future of Compute and Energy verticals can reinforce the message that these technologies are not niche experiments but critical infrastructure for the country's economic and security interests.

4.2 Convening around grid and energy bottlenecks

Given the centrality of energy and grid capacity issues, the ecosystem would benefit from a focused, cross-sector dialogue between founders, grid operators, regulators, policymakers, and large electricity users. Such a forum could clarify where quick-win regulatory or process changes are possible and where longer-term infrastructure investments and European-level coordination are required.

By articulating the specific needs of compute- and energy-intensive deeptech ventures, we can help ensure that future grid and electricity planning explicitly considers the requirements of this emerging industrial base.

The electricity constraint is equally relevant to the Future of Compute and Energy companies, making it a natural candidate for a joint working group or shared policy brief that brings both communities together.

4.3 A more honest conversation about subsidies

Participants' mixed experiences with subsidies suggest the need for more nuanced guidance rather than a simple pro- or anti-subsidy stance.

There is a need for practical guidance on when public instruments create genuine strategic value and when they extract more than they give. This includes engaging with public authorities on the design of calls to reduce forced consortia, encourage genuine market validation, and allow more flexibility for companies to adapt plans as technology and market insights evolve.

4.4 Clarifying IP and engagement models with public research

The concerns around IP terms and competitive behaviour by publicly supported entities reflect a structural tension between academic and commercial incentives that the ecosystem has not yet resolved. Greater transparency and standardisation of IP arrangements, convertible instruments, and collaboration agreements would benefit all parties. The goal is genuine partnership: research institutions and venture-backed companies creating value together, rather than in competition.

4.5 Improving access to fabrication and lab facilities

The expressed need for better visibility into fab, cleanroom and lab infrastructure points to a concrete, actionable intervention. A structured survey or questionnaire to participating companies can map which facilities are most critical, where capacity gaps exist, and what access barriers (pricing, contracts, logistics) are most acute. Based on this mapping, discussions with national infrastructure providers to explore dedicated access windows and tailored pricing models that directly support scaling deeptech ventures can be facilitated.

4.6 Ecosystem & Policy Signals

Three signals from the Roadshow that warrant elevation in dialogue with policymakers and funding bodies.

STRATEGIC NATIONAL CHALLENGE

Grid capacity and electricity pricing are not just business constraints — they are strategic national challenges. Founder evidence provides a strong empirical basis for elevating these topics with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and at the European level.

INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

The competitive dynamics around certain research institutions warrant attention from policymakers and funding bodies. Current incentive structures can inadvertently crowd out the private innovation they were designed to support.

A GAP IN THE SUPPORT LANDSCAPE

The IP deal-term complexity identified — particularly around convertibles in hardware-IP-intensive businesses — is a gap in the current support landscape yet to be addressed in a structured way.

SECTION 05

The Bigger Picture

The Netherlands holds a genuinely rare position in global compute and energy innovation.

The companies that participated in the Roadshow are building technologies that matter for the country's economic competitiveness, its strategic autonomy, and its ability to shape the next generation of critical infrastructure.

Getting the conditions right for these ventures to scale is not a niche concern — it is a national priority. The Roadshow was a starting point for a longer conversation, and the ecosystem's willingness to engage candidly signals both the urgency of the challenges and the appetite to address them together.

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Building the conditions for Dutch deeptech to scale.

Techleap accelerates the growth of Dutch tech founders and companies to drive economic progress and societal change. Driven by a dynamic community of founders, investors and stakeholders, the organisation cultivates a unique ecosystem focused on knowledge sharing and collaboration. Its mission is to establish the Netherlands as a global hub for tech entrepreneurship across sectors and technologies, enabling the country to effectively respond to major societal transitions, safeguard jobs and secure future prosperity.