

# Upstream Festival 2026 proves to be a launchpad for founder-focused initiatives

*From follow-on support to new programmes and collaboration, this year's Upstream Festival showed how ideas can keep gaining momentum beyond the event itself.*

ROTTERDAM, SOUTH HOLLAND, NETHERLANDS, May 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Upstream Festival 2026 once again brought together founders, investors, and ecosystem builders from across Europe for a day of curated connections and practical opportunities. But beyond the conversations on stage and the meetings on the floor, this year's edition also highlighted something else clearly: Upstream is increasingly becoming a launchpad for the kinds of initiatives founders actually need.

At this year's festival, that was visible in multiple ways – from the continued impact of initiatives first introduced at earlier editions, to the launch of new founder-focused concepts aimed at helping startups and scale-ups move forward.

One clear example is Rabobank's Innovation Contribution, which was launched at Upstream Festival 2025 as a financial boost for entrepreneurs in the earliest stages of innovation. Designed to support founders at the moment when ideas are still developing, and traditional financing is often difficult to secure, the contribution has already helped startups take important next steps.

One of the companies that benefited is Compone. The contribution enabled them to bring their product to further markets.



Upstream Founder Circle - A new concept designed specifically for founders who are already beyond the earliest stage of building and are now navigating the realities of growth, leadership, difficult decisions, and resilience.

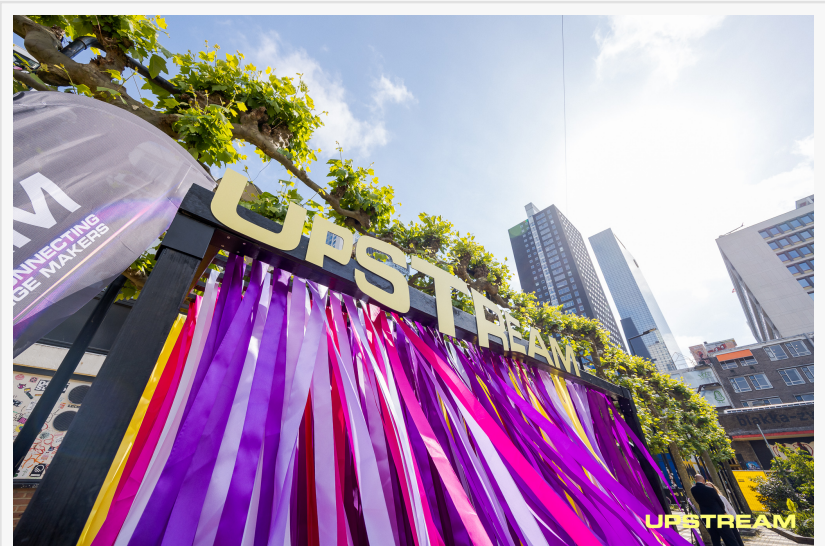
Jochem Cuppen from Compone says: “The Rabo Innovation Contribution helps Compone bring our circular products for the construction and infrastructure sectors further to market. It is a valuable boost, with a clear and accessible process without unnecessary fuss.”

Rabobank sees the Innovation Contribution as a way to make sure promising ideas do not stall in a phase where innovation is still vulnerable, but full of potential.

Cooperative Director Rabobank South Holland Juultje van der Wijk says: “We are proud that, through the Rabo Innovation Contribution, we can support entrepreneurs in our region in realising their innovation. Many meaningful innovations emerge in a phase where financing is still difficult. This contribution offers precisely then a financial impulse, so promising ideas have the space to develop, prove themselves, and grow into concrete impact.”

Another initiative launched at Upstream Festival 2026 was the Upstream Founder Circle – a new concept designed specifically for founders who are already beyond the earliest stage of building and are now navigating the realities of growth, leadership, difficult decisions, and resilience. The Founder Circle is built around a carefully selected group of founders who come together for peer exchange, reflection, and practical guidance, creating space to sharpen decision-making and grow alongside others facing similar challenges.

Upstream Festival 2026 also marked the launch of Founded in South Holland, an initiative supported by the City of Rotterdam and regional partners, aimed at helping startups and scale-ups navigate the ecosystem and scale faster. South Holland is one of Europe’s leading deeptech regions, but only a fraction of startups manage to successfully scale: out of more than 3,800 startups, only around 150 reach scale-up stage. The challenge is not only starting companies – it’s scaling them. That is where the pressure builds for CEOs: hiring senior talent fast, raising larger rounds with higher stakes, finding production space that doesn’t exist yet, dealing with permits, regulation and timelines that slow them down, and securing customers that match their



Upstream Festival 2026 - onnecting startups, capital, and opportunities



Jorg Kop launching Founded in South Holland



Upstream has always been about helping founders make the right connections at the right moment.”

*Lisette Braakenburg van Backum and Robbin Hoogstraten*

ambition.

Founded in South Holland shows what it really takes to scale a company in this region and what needs to change. By making existing strengths work together more effectively, it helps companies move faster when it matters most. This happens through targeted support around scaling challenges such as talent, capital, and market access, while strengthening the connections across the broader startup and scale-up ecosystem.

“We see the same pattern again and again: the ingredients are here, but they don’t always connect in time,” says Jorg Kop, Private Lead of Founded in South Holland. “Founded is about making sure that connection happens when it matters most.”

By bringing these initiatives into the same space, Upstream showed what its role in the ecosystem can be: not only as a festival where people meet, but as a place where ideas gain traction, support becomes tangible, and founder-focused solutions get the attention and momentum they need.

Lisette Braakenburg van Backum and Robbin Hoogstraten, co-founders of Upstream Festival, say:

“Upstream has always been about helping founders make the right connections at the right moment. What was especially meaningful this year is seeing how the festival can support both new ideas and initiatives that continue to grow after being introduced here. That is exactly the kind of role we want Upstream to play – bringing the ecosystem together for one day and helping create momentum that lasts beyond the event itself – also beyond the Festival.”

From practical financial support to founder development and stronger ecosystem alignment, the initiatives connected to Upstream Festival 2026 all point in the same direction: creating better conditions for ambitious founders to grow.

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About Upstream Festival

Upstream is where startups find capital, connections, and opportunities to grow. Founded in 2020, Upstream Festival brings together a highly curated group of founders, investors, corporates, and ecosystem builders who believe in building companies that create long-term value. Through curated matchmaking, practical programming, and community-driven initiatives, Upstream helps founders move forward with more clarity, stronger connections, and better opportunities.

Christine Michaelis

Upstream Festival

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