

Dr. Ferenc Pongrácz, PhD, MBA, PMP

Startup Mentor | Innovation Strategist | EU Ecosystem Builder

 **Based in Budapest** |  **Active in EU**

Profile

Experienced startup mentor and innovation leader with a strong background in supporting early-stage and scale-up ventures across Europe and beyond. With 20+ years of leadership experience in international corporations, EU programs, and public-private ecosystems, I bring a unique combination of strategic insight, hands-on mentoring, and global connectivity.

As Deputy Managing Director and Regional Director at EIT Health InnoStars, I work closely with startups, SMEs, corporates, universities, and healthcare providers in Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Hungary, supporting innovation acceleration, market access, and international growth. I mentor startups through EU-funded programs, EIT Health calls, and regional initiatives.

My approach is pragmatic and impact-driven, combining strategic positioning, business model validation, and ecosystem navigation. I have direct experience introducing AI-based technologies to the market (e.g., IBM Watson for Oncology), and have guided startups in digital health, medtech, agritech, sustainability and other domains.

At IBM, I held multiple senior roles and led both business and functional units across Europe, including finance, operations, technology services, and strategic business development. My leadership background is reinforced by a PMP certification, and I apply structured project and program management principles in innovation mentoring and ecosystem design.

I am also a former member of the Innovation Board of Hungary's National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDIO), and currently lecture at Corvinus University of Budapest. My corporate experience includes 16+ years at IBM (regional leadership, startup cooperation) and innovation transformation leadership at Tungsram Group.

Key Areas of Mentoring Expertise

- Startup Strategy & Positioning

- Business Model Development
 - EU Funding & Acceleration Programs
 - Investor Readiness & Pitch Coaching
 - Cross-border Growth & Market Access (EU, GCC)
 - AI & Digital Health Innovation
 - Corporate Collaboration & Open Innovation
 - Project & Program Management (PMP Certified)
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Selected Roles & Contributions

EIT Health InnoStars

Deputy Managing Director & Regional Director (Italy, Poland, Portugal, Hungary)

- Supporting health startups through innovation programs and funding calls
- Connecting startups to EU networks, investors, and clinical partners

Tungsram Group

Chief Innovation Officer

- Led startup partnerships in manufacturing and smart technologies
- Winner of National Innovation Award

IBM

Regional Executive, Innovation Lead, Business & Functional Unit Leader

- Built startup collaboration models in Southern & Eastern Europe
- Introduced AI-based innovations in health and finance sectors
- Led various business and functional areas including finance, technology services, and operations across EMEA

NRDIO – National Innovation Office of Hungary

Innovation Board Member

- Helped shape Hungary's innovation strategy and startup support landscape

Corvinus University of Budapest

University Lecturer

- Educating the next generation of business leaders, including startup founders
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Education & Certification

PhD, Regional Sciences – Széchenyi István University

MBA, Business Administration – Budapest University of Technology and Economics

BA, Managerial Economics – Széchenyi István University

PMP – Project Management Professional – PMI Certified

Certified SAP Consultant

Certified International Controlling Manager

Passionate about helping mission-driven founders succeed. Available for mentoring, jury work, and ecosystem advisory roles.