Facebook launches startup programme in Paris campus

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Facebook launched its first ever startup support programme in Paris Tuesday, in a massive tech incubator funded by a French telecoms billionaire.

The social media giant said it wanted to facilitate the emergence of "independent startups that contribute to the data economy of France and Europe."

Speaking at the site of the future 34,000 square-metre (366,000 square-foot) Station F campus, Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg praised Paris as "a city of new ideas."

"Entrepreneurs are the engine of economic growth here in France and around the world," she said.

Starting in April, when Station F opens in a former railway depot in the 13th arrondissement of Paris, Facebook will mentor five startups in the areas of e-health, digital identity verification, carpooling and personal information management.

The number of new enterprises being nurtured will grow to between 10 and 15 over time, with each company receiving six months of coaching in marketing, technological development and other areas, Facebook said.

With over three dozen startup incubators, Paris is vying with London to become Europe's innovation capital, and in so doing quash perceptions

that France is "unfriendly" to business.

Station F, the brainchild of telecoms titan Xavier Niel, aims to be the world's biggest startup campus, with up to a thousand new ventures housed under the one roof, near the Seine River.

The entrepreneurs will be counselled by French online retailer Vente-Privee, the prestigious HEC business school and Facebook and work with on-site venture capital funds.

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