

“Building bridges between global goals and local realities”

10/02/2026 With “Start-up Your Dream, ” Porsche has launched a flagship initiative to support start-ups. We spoke with Dr. Philipp Metz (Porsche AG), Professor Lucia Reisch (Member of the Porsche Sustainability Council) and Kee Tai (Co-Founder of Atera Water) about the program's objectives, their experiences, and the role of social initiatives within the broader sustainability context.

Dr. Metz, how does “Start-up Your Dream” fit into Porsche's sustainability strategy?

Dr. Philipp Metz: The program is a core element of Porsche's approach to social sustainability. As a Partner to Society, Porsche is committed to addressing global social challenges – for example, improving living conditions or tackling the consequences of climate change. With “Start-up Your Dream” we aim to set targeted impulses by supporting start-ups together with our partners, whose solutions also address the root causes of societal challenges and create long-lasting impact. By fostering start-ups, we seek to scale social innovations and reach as many people as possible worldwide in areas of social engagement that are particularly relevant to Porsche.

Professor Reisch, what role do social initiatives play in the overall sustainability context?

Prof. Dr. Lucia Reisch: Social initiatives are often a foundational pillar of sustainable transformation. We speak extensively about CO_2 reduction and technological innovation, yet without social stability and participation, these advances remain fragile. Sustainability is a triad of environmental, economic, and social dimensions. If we neglect the social dimension, we risk acceptance issues, widening inequalities, and ultimately the failure of transformation processes. Initiatives that empower people to improve their living conditions independently create resilience – and resilience is essential for a more sustainable future.

Dr. Metz, how did the idea for "Start-up Your Dream" emerge?

Metz: We wanted to expand our existing societal engagement with a new approach. Instead of exclusively implementing projects ourselves, we decided to support start-ups that also address social issues through innovation. Supporting start-ups is therefore a key lever for further unfolding Porsche's social impact. We pursue this through an individually tailored program based on four pillars: Education, Mentoring, Networking, and Financing. This combination ensures that start-ups receive not only financial support but also strategic and operational guidance. Our focus is firmly on the quality and sustainability of the support provided. In 2025, we launched the first wave of the program together with Atera Water.

Ms. Tai, what is the core idea behind your company Atera Water? What motivates you personally?

Kee Tai: Our guiding principle is clear: access to clean drinking water for everyone. Water is a fundamental prerequisite for life. To achieve this, we develop cost-efficient and environmentally responsible solutions by combining membrane research with engineering expertise. This has resulted in a water filtration technology capable of providing clean drinking water in water-scarce and heavily polluted regions – while reducing chemical discharge and energy consumption. I am driven by the belief that technology can solve social challenges when applied thoughtfully. Porsche's support has reinforced us in this conviction.

Professor Reisch, why are social issues often underestimated – and why are they still crucial for transformation, including in technology-driven fields?

Reisch: Because they are less immediately visible than technical solutions. Environmental targets can be measured; social impact and stability are far more difficult to quantify. Yet without social acceptance and inclusion, ecological and economic measures cannot fully succeed. We see globally how inequality and a lack of future prospects fuel resistance and conflict. Social initiatives build trust and expand the room for action – they can be a strategic lever. Those who understand this also recognize that social innovations are not only morally imperative but economically sound: they secure markets and reduce risks. I see this potential clearly in Atera Water.

Dr. Metz, why was Atera Water selected, particularly in the context of innovation?

Metz: Atera Water addresses two of our six strategic impact areas in social engagement: improving living conditions and climate change. Access to clean and affordable drinking water is a global challenge, particularly in Southeast Asia. Atera Water combines high-tech solutions with social value creation – this is exactly what we are looking for. Additionally, the start-up already cooperates with Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. We aim to support initiatives that create local impact while offering global scalability.

How did you experience the collaboration with Porsche?

Tai: We had the opportunity to get to know Porsche directly on site in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen – and we were deeply impressed by the passion of the employees. They truly live the brand and engage with it wholeheartedly. The quality of the support and the appreciation shown toward us were very moving. Together, we defined a clear development path and concrete objectives for our start-up.

What were your personal highlights within the program?

Tai: One major highlight was an extensive team training in Singapore, where we learned, among other things, how to communicate our vision convincingly and with impact. Participation in the "Ignite Entrepreneurship Training Program" at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge was another milestone. The week in Cambridge provided us with tools to think big, set bold goals, and pursue them consistently. Visiting Porsche in Stuttgart was also highly inspiring. The direct exchange with experts and members of the Sustainability Council opened up new perspectives and led to several "aha moments," showing us how to improve existing routines. The open feedback from within the company was particularly valuable in sharpening our strategy and identifying new markets.

Dr. Metz, what insights have you drawn from the first wave of the program?

Metz: The courage and innovative drive of start-ups are inspiring. We have seen that supporting start-ups is challenging, yet at the same time offers many opportunities. When it succeeds, it can create tremendous impact. We also learned that the quality of support is decisive. Standardized programs and trainings are not sufficient – customized content and individual mentoring make all the difference. Finally, the experience reinforced how essential it is to anchor social innovation firmly within the corporate strategy.

Professor Reisch, your personal conclusion: Why can initiatives like this be a key to the future?

Reisch: Initiatives such as "Start-up Your Dream" can build bridges between global goals and local realities. Social innovations can create resilience, foster participation, and open up new pathways for long-term growth. They are not a nice-to-have, but a strategic imperative. Companies that understand this do not merely secure their own future – they actively contribute to solving the major challenges of our time. That is the benchmark against which sustainability must ultimately be measured.

About Atera Water

Atera Water is developing water filtration technology designed to make clean drinking water available even in regions where water is scarce or polluted – with minimal use of chemicals. The start-up combines scientific excellence with practical use and sees itself as a partner to help solve global water problems. Atera Water combines innovation from membrane research with applied engineering to bring a cost effective and energy efficient filtration system to market maturity. Initial pilot deployments have shown promising results.

Porsche: "Start-up Your Dream"

With "Start-up Your Dream", Porsche is implementing a flagship project to provide support for start-ups. The initiative aims to reach as many people as possible in important social areas. The funding is based on the four pillars of education, networking, mentoring and financing and is individually tailored to the needs of the courageous and creative founders.

Porsche: Partner to Society

“Partner to Society” is a strategy field in sustainability at Porsche. With various initiatives, donations and CSR activities, the sports car manufacturer aims to assist regions around the world in preserving the environment, guaranteeing good working and living conditions and strengthening social cohesion. Under the motto “Creating Chances”, Porsche is particularly committed to self-help projects designed to empower people in their living and working environment – and to help make their very personal dreams come true.

Porsche Sustainability Council

The Porsche Sustainability Council is composed of external experts from business, academia, and civil society and institutionalizes stakeholder dialogue on sustainability. The Sustainability Advisory Board regularly advises the Executive Board and top management on the strategic alignment of sustainability and provides important impulses.

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