



Investment Guide for Startups in the US

Raising investment in the US is not just about presenting an idea; it is about effectively delivering vision, preparation, and a reassuring narrative in one of the world's most competitive startup environments. This guide is prepared to remind founders from abroad that this path is accessible; with the right strategy, disciplined preparation, and strong positioning, great opportunities can become reality.

2026 UPDATED GUIDE

US-FOCUSED

EARLY STAGE

ENGLISH

What Will This Guide Teach You?

It is extremely easy to get lost in the world of investing. Reaching out to the wrong people, giving an unprepared presentation, or not knowing the right platforms — these mistakes consume both your time and your most valuable opportunities. This guide was prepared by bringing together the real financing sources in the U.S., the right application addresses, and proven strategies so you can take your startup to the next stage.

01

Learn the Types of Investment

From angel investors to venture capital, from accelerators to crowdfunding — learn how each financing model works, when it is suitable, and how much capital it can provide.

03

Prepare for the Application

Pitch deck, one-pager, financial model, and data room — prepare every document investors look for in the first review and make a strong first impression.

02

Find the Right Investor

Identify the investors best suited to your industry, stage, and business model. Focus not on generic lists, but on platforms that are truly meaningful for you.

04

Take Action

Turn information into action with real web addresses, application links, and direct communication channels. The right step is the one taken today.

Layer 1: Angel Investors

Angel investors are individual investors who put their own capital into early-stage startups. They typically invest between \$25,000 and \$500,000, and they often also provide industry experience, mentorship, and network connections. Unlike a VC fund, angel investors make decisions more quickly and operate with less bureaucracy.

✓ Angel Investor Advantages

- Fast decision-making process (1-4 weeks)
- Mentorship and industry experience
- Network and introduction opportunities
- Less bureaucratic process
- More freedom for the founder

⚠ Things to Watch Out For

- Investment amounts are usually limited (\$25K-\$500K)
- Not every angel is an active mentor
- Equity share requires negotiation (5%-20%)
- Some angels may intervene too much
- Be sure to check references

📌 Before making a deal with an angel investor, talk to the founders they have invested in before. Finding a "smart money" investor — meaning one who adds value, not just capital — is more important than the amount you raise.



Angel Investor Discovery Platforms

The fastest way to reach angel investors is to use the right platforms. The platforms below provide access to thousands of angel investors in the U.S. — each one serves a different stage, sector, and investment size. Which platform you choose depends on your startup's stage, industry, and how much funding you're seeking. The most effective strategy: be active on multiple platforms at once and use each one for a different purpose.

AngelList / Wellfound

Web: [wellfound.com](https://www.wellfound.com)

One of the world's largest startup-investor connection platforms, AngelList / Wellfound offers broad visibility for early-stage startups. With more than 100,000 active investor profiles, you can stand out by filtering your startup by sector, stage, geography, and investment interest. By turning on the "Fundraising" mode, it is possible to reach investors who are actively looking for opportunities. The platform is especially strong for technology, SaaS, consumer products, and fast-scaling digital models. It is very effective for creating a profile, gauging investor interest, and starting first contacts. Its free starter plan also makes early testing possible.

Gust

Web: gust.com

Gust is a long-standing platform used by angel groups and early-stage investors. By providing access to more than 80,000 investors and over 600 angel groups, it offers multi-investor outreach through a single application. Founders can present their investment materials in a standardized format, manage applications in bulk, and move through the feedback process more systematically. It is especially suitable for pre-seed and seed-stage startups, because investors at this stage focus more on the story, the team, and market potential. It is a practical and scalable starting point for founders who want to reach angel groups at the same time.

SeedInvest

Web: seedinvest.com

SeedInvest is an SEC-regulated equity crowdfunding platform that allows startups to raise up to \$5M under Reg CF from both accredited and non-accredited investors. The application process is highly selective; an acceptance rate below 1% shows the platform's exclusivity. However, accepted startups gain access to a much larger and stronger investor pool. Campaigns are typically positioned in the \$500K–\$2M range, which makes the platform suitable for early-stage companies with meaningful traction. It is especially effective for companies with a strong story, product validation, and community potential that can spark investor interest.

Angel Capital Association

Web: angelcapitalassociation.org

The Angel Capital Association (ACA) stands out as the umbrella organization for angel investor groups in the U.S. With more than 14,000 angel members and over 250 member groups, it is a powerful resource for reaching specific investor segments. ACA's online directory helps you find angel groups in your region or industry and apply directly. This is especially valuable for startups that want to build strong relationships in a specific geography. In addition, the annual ACA Summit offers the opportunity to meet hundreds of angel investors in person, build trust, and create warm connections. It is one of the most strategic options for startups seeking direct group access.

Republic

Web: republic.com

Republic stands out for its hybrid structure, which is open to both angel and crowd investors. Accredited investors can also invest through a dedicated "Republic Capital" arm, making it a strong option in terms of both reach and flexibility. It is especially suitable for consumer-facing products, community-driven startups, and companies with strong brand impact. Startups that want to create early momentum by leveraging crowd investor interest can run more visible campaigns here. The application process starts at republic.com/raise, and with the right story framing, investor interest can be increased.

MicroVentures

Web: microventures.com

MicroVentures is an experienced platform that offers both angel investing and equity crowdfunding services. Its focus on accredited investors makes it a good fit for startups that want to work with a more selective audience with higher investment capacity. The average round size of \$500K–\$2M shows that the platform is aimed at early-stage companies with serious funding needs. It is active in technology, healthcare, and consumer products, making it especially valuable for startups in these sectors that are showing signs of product-market fit. The campaign structure should be designed to highlight investor confidence and campaign quality.

Fundable

Web: fundable.com

Fundable is designed for small businesses and early-stage startups and allows both reward-based and equity-based campaigns. This dual structure provides flexibility for startups that want to gather demand before launch or test investor interest. Its particular suitability for B2B startups helps it perform well for companies with clear sales cycles and understandable business models. It also offers direct access to an investor database, enabling not just campaign publishing but also more active outreach. It is a useful tool for founders who want to run fundraising and customer validation at the same time.

LinkedIn Investor Network

Web: linkedin.com

Although LinkedIn is not a direct investment platform, it is one of the strongest tools for reaching angel investors. By searching with keywords such as "Angel Investor," "Venture Capital," and "Startup Investor," you can quickly list relevant people. Requesting warm introductions through mutual connections leads to much better response rates than cold messages. If you have a Premium account, you can speed up communication by sending direct messages via InMail. LinkedIn's biggest advantage is that it allows you to evaluate an investor not only as a profile, but also through past experience, network connections, areas of interest, and mutual contacts. This helps you create a more personalized and strategic outreach approach.

Platform Selection Guide: If you are at the pre-seed stage → start with Gust and AngelList. If you want to reach a specific angel group → use the ACA directory. If you want access to a large investor base → apply to SeedInvest or Republic. If you want to contact investors directly → look for warm intros with LinkedIn Premium.

Leading Angel Investor Groups

In addition to individual angels, organized angel groups also provide startups with significant amounts of early-stage capital. These groups typically focus on specific sectors or geographic regions and hold monthly pitch meetings. Being accepted into an angel group means gaining access not just to one investor, but to dozens of experienced investors at once. Most groups accept applications online and complete the initial review within 2-4 weeks.

Tech Coast Angels

Web: techcoastangels.com/entrepreneurs

The largest angel network in Southern California, Tech Coast Angels is highly active in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange County. It focuses on technology, healthcare, and consumer products startups, making it a strong first capital source for both B2B and B2C models. The network provides not only capital, but also access to experienced operators, industry experts, and follow-on investors. Investing more than \$20M annually makes it one of the most productive regional angel networks in the U.S.

New York Angels

Based in New York, this group has more than 100 active angel members and concentrates on fintech, media, e-commerce, and SaaS. Its city-based structure gives founders access to investors with strong connections in the finance and media worlds. Monthly pitch meetings are held, and accepted startups are presented to all members, creating the opportunity to meet a broad investor base with a single application. This setup is a major advantage for founders seeking fast feedback and experienced investor evaluation. Application: newyorkangels.com/apply

Harvard Business School Angels

Founded by Harvard Business School alumni, this global network offers not only capital but also a powerful alumni and trust network. It has active chapters in Boston, New York, San Francisco, and London, making it geographically highly accessible. It is especially a door-opening network for founders with HBS connections, but it also provides access to a high-quality investor profile for companies without such ties. Members are typically experienced operators, entrepreneurs, and investors, so the strategic feedback value is high. hbsangels.com

Band of Angels

Founded in 1994, Band of Angels is Silicon Valley's oldest angel group and one of the most established examples of startup investing culture. It has more than 150 active members; most are successful technology entrepreneurs, senior executives, and professionals who have spent many years in the startup ecosystem. At monthly meetings, 3-4 startups present, which shows how selective it is. The group provides not only capital, but also deep expertise in product, market, and growth strategy. Application: bandangels.com/apply

Golden Seeds

This angel network, which focuses on women-led startups, stands out with its inclusive investment approach. It has active chapters in New York, Boston, Atlanta, and other cities, providing investment access across different ecosystems. Having invested more than \$200M since 2005 shows the group's long-term impact and scale. Golden Seeds focuses especially on creating capital, mentorship, and visibility in areas where women founders are underrepresented. goldenseeds.com

Keiretsu Forum

Considered one of the largest angel investment networks in the world, Keiretsu Forum holds regional meetings in more than 50 cities. This broad geographic structure allows startups to test investor interest not only in one market but also internationally. It stands out with more than \$150M in annual investment volume and appeals to a very wide founder base thanks to its open structure across all sectors. The network's biggest advantage is that investors in different cities come together on a common platform, enabling startups to access a broader capital pool beyond regional boundaries. keiretsuforum.com

Alliance of Angels

Seattle-based Alliance of Angels is one of the most active angel groups in the Northwestern U.S. Its technology and software-focused investment approach creates a strong match, especially for B2B SaaS, infrastructure, and product-oriented startups. Having invested more than \$100M since 1997 demonstrates both its continuity and its impact on the regional ecosystem. Because the Seattle ecosystem is concentrated in engineering, product development, and enterprise technology, this group is a strategic gateway for startups with technical products. allianceofangels.com

Central Texas Angel Network (CTAN)

Based in Austin, CTAN provides access to Texas's rapidly growing startup ecosystem and is an important early capital source, especially for technology startups in the region. Its focus on technology, healthcare, and energy makes it a meaningful option in both digital and deep-tech areas. Thanks to Austin's founder-friendly environment, CTAN members often bring local market knowledge, corporate connections, and early-stage operational experience. For founders aiming to grow from Texas, it is valuable both for capital and for building regional trust. centraltexasangelnetwork.com

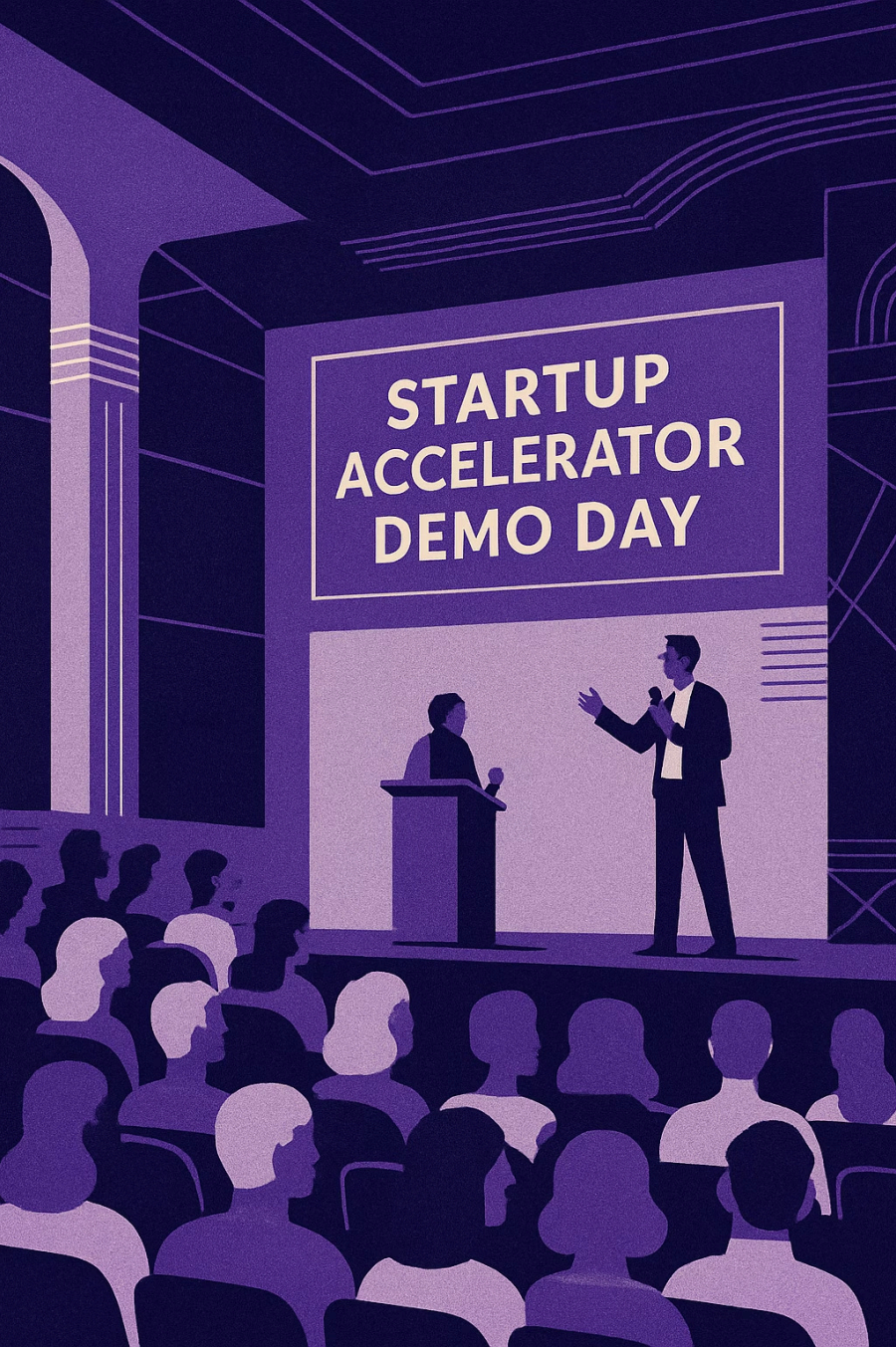
Pipeline Angels

Pipeline Angels is an angel network that invests in women and non-binary entrepreneurs and places inclusivity at the center. It strengthens the ecosystem not only in capital terms, but also through participation and education by offering both investor and founder programs. Its suitability for social impact startups sets it apart from classic financially driven networks. Thanks to its program-based approach, startups can not only seek investment but also receive practical support on storytelling, pitch preparation, and the investment process. pipelineangels.com

Launchpad Venture Group

Boston-based Launchpad Venture Group is one of the leading angel groups in New England. Its focus on technology and life sciences aligns strongly with the region's university ecosystem, research institutions, and healthcare innovation. Investing in 30-40 startups per year shows that the group has an active and consistent investment pace. It is a strong match especially for startups that are close to completing product development, have technical depth, and are beginning to show early commercial signals. launchpadventuregroup.com

Things to consider when applying to an angel group: Every group has a different sector focus, geographic preference, and investment size. Review the group's last 10 investments before applying. An unmatched application is a waste of time — the right fit opens doors.



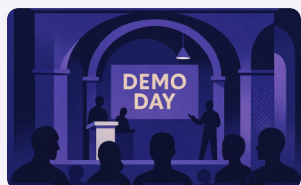
Layer 2: Accelerators and Incubators

Accelerators are programs that take equity in early-stage startups in exchange for mentorship, office space, network, and capital. They typically run as intensive 3-6 month programs and end with an event called “Demo Day,” where startups present to hundreds of investors.

Completing accelerator programs in the U.S. is not just about money; it is a gateway into a real ecosystem. Their alumni networks, visibility, and credibility for the next round provide important advantages.

World-Class Accelerators

The accelerators below sit at the top of the US startup ecosystem. Each one serves a different sector, stage, or founder profile. Before applying, determining which accelerator is the best fit for you will help you use both your time and energy efficiently.

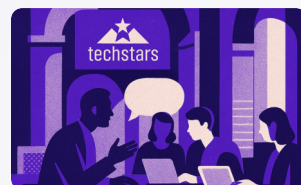


Y Combinator (YC)

Web: ycombinator.com/apply

The world's most prestigious accelerator. It has supported companies like Airbnb, Stripe, Dropbox, Reddit, and Coinbase at an early stage. It accepts two batches per year (Winter and Summer); each batch selects approximately 200–250 startups. It invests \$500,000: \$125,000 fixed for 7% equity, and an additional \$375,000 via an uncapped MFN SAFE. Total investment is \$500,000.

During the 3-month intensive program, participants get access to weekly office hours, experienced founder mentors, and a powerful alumni network. The program ends with Demo Day, where startups pitch in front of hundreds of investors. The application is entirely online and free. The acceptance rate is around 1–2% — making it one of the most selective programs in the world.



Techstars

Web: techstars.com/entrepreneurs

A global accelerator network with programs in more than 100 cities and across sectors. Each program accepts 10–12 startups and provides three months of intensive mentorship, networking, and resource support. It invests \$220,000: \$200,000 uncapped MFN SAFE + \$20,000 convertible equity (CEA) in exchange for 5% equity. (Updated terms as of 2025)

Thanks to strong corporate partners (such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Barclays), it offers pilot customer and strategic partnership opportunities. It has especially strong programs in fintech, health, defense, and climate technology. Its alumni network includes more than 4,000 companies. Application: techstars.com/entrepreneurs



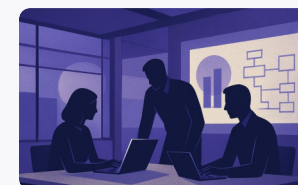
500 Global (500 Startups)

Web: 500.co/founders

An accelerator especially accessible for international founders. Having invested in entrepreneurs from more than 80 countries makes it one of the best options for Turkish founders.

It takes 5–6% equity in exchange for \$150,000 investment (the \$37,500 program fee is deducted from the investment, net \$112,500).

The program focuses on product-market fit, growth strategy, and investor relations. Its portfolio includes more than 2,700 companies. The application process emphasizes traction and growth potential.



Andreessen Horowitz (a16z) START

Web: a16z.com/start

A16z's tier-1 VC firm has a dedicated program for the pre-seed and seed stages. It offers a more flexible structure than a traditional accelerator; selected startups receive individualized support, expert guidance, and access to the network based on their needs.

Participants gain access to a16z's broad portfolio network, expert operators, and corporate connections. It focuses on AI, fintech, consumer, and enterprise technology. The investment amount varies; therefore, the program is shaped according to the startup's stage and priorities rather than a one-size-fits-all package.

- ✔ Accelerator Selection Guide: If you are at the idea stage → Entrepreneur First or Founder Institute. If you have an early product and first users → YC, Techstars, or 500 Global. If you want to enter the US as an international founder → 500 Global or Techstars. If you are focused on B2B SaaS or enterprise → Alchemist or Techstars.

Other Important Accelerators

MassChallenge

Web: masschallenge.org

A global accelerator with a no-equity, cash-prize model that is especially attractive for early-stage startups. It runs programs in ecosystems such as Boston, New York, Texas, and Switzerland, supporting startups in healthcare, climate, fintech, defense, artificial intelligence, and general-purpose innovation.

Because MassChallenge does not use the classic equity-for-investment model, it is very founder-friendly. Throughout the program, it offers mentorship, expert sessions, investor access, pilot customer opportunities, and demo day support. In some locations, total cash prizes can reach hundreds of thousands of dollars; teams can receive capital or grant-like support without giving up equity.

Notable alumni include Flywire, sustainability-focused startups associated with Greentown Labs, and health tech companies. Applications emphasize problem-solution fit, market size, and social impact potential. The acceptance odds improve when the founding team applies with strong storytelling and clear traction.

Plug and Play Tech Center

Web: plugandplaytechcenter.com

A giant Silicon Valley-based innovation platform that runs programs across many verticals such as fintech, health, mobility, retail, insurtech, enterprise tech, and supply chain. It is active in cities around the world and combines corporate innovation with startup acceleration.

Plug and Play's biggest strength is its vast corporate partner network: it matches startups with banks, insurance companies, manufacturers, logistics firms, and major technology companies. This helps startups reach pilots, PoCs, and customer connections faster. The investment model may vary by program and location; in most cases, the main value is access and corporate distribution channels.

Its global footprint is very broad, with many offices and acceleration programs across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. When applying, vertical specialization, enterprise customer sales potential, and measurable results from pilots matter. Products that are ready for corporate integration are usually at an advantage.

Alchemist Accelerator

Web: alchemistaccelerator.com

One of the most respected corporate-sales-focused accelerators in the world, focused on B2B and enterprise SaaS startups. It is a strong option especially for developers, technical founders, and teams looking to accelerate enterprise customer acquisition.

Rather than consumer products, Alchemist works with high-ticket B2B solutions that have long sales cycles. The program focuses on customer discovery, enterprise sales, pricing, product positioning, fundraising, and investor pitching. Investment terms may vary by cohort; the program's value comes primarily from expert mentorship and enterprise connections.

Applications are usually evaluated based on team quality, clarity of the corporate problem, and early pilot signals. Alchemist alumni include successful startups in enterprise software and infrastructure. Clearly explaining the B2B pain point, target decision-maker, and sales process in the application increases the chances of acceptance.

First Round Fast Track

Web: firstround.com/fast-track

A free education, network, and visibility program from First Round Capital, designed especially for underrepresented founder groups. It aims to give minority, women, and disadvantaged entrepreneurial communities earlier access to a strong investor network.

The program delivers significant value even without direct investment like a traditional accelerator: founder community, mentor meetings, investor introductions, workshops, and access to the First Round ecosystem. There is no investment guarantee; however, strong performance and clear founder signals can help you get on First Round's radar and eventually lead to an investment conversation at a later stage.

Who can apply varies by call, but high learning capacity, a clear understanding of the problem, and founder resilience are important criteria. When applying, it helps to clearly show your motivation, why you belong to this community, and the startup's early signals.

Founder Institute

Web: fi.co

One of the world's largest pre-seed accelerators, operating programs in more than 200 cities. It is focused on founders at the idea stage, so it offers a structure that can be applied to even before having a product or a complete team.

One of the program's strongest aspects is its structured curriculum. Weekly sessions cover idea validation, customer discovery, market analysis, business models, founder psychology, brand building, and fundraising preparation. It typically uses a low equity stake and a simple SAFE-like structure, creating a founder-friendly starting point.

Thanks to its global reach, founders connect to local mentor networks while also gaining access to an international community. Success stories include B2B and consumer startups that have grown in various regions. When applying, idea clarity, founder commitment, and fit with the program's discipline are especially important.

Antler

Web: antler.co

A global pre-seed accelerator that offers a model reimagining co-founder matching and company formation from the ground up. It has active programs in New York, Austin, and other U.S. cities, as well as in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Antler's distinguishing feature is its co-founder matching process: solo founders first enter the program, get matched with people who have complementary skills, and then have the chance to build a company together. Selected teams then receive investment, mentorship, and access to a global network. Although investment terms vary by location, Antler generally provides early capital to pre-seed startups.

It is very active in fintech, SaaS, consumer, AI, and deep tech. Since founder fit is as critical as the problem selection, experience and complementary skill sets stand out. It is also a strong starting point for solo founders.

Dreamit Ventures

Web: dreamit.com

An accelerator focused on healthtech, securetech, and urbantech. It operates through a strong network centered in Philadelphia and New York and focuses especially on startups that go deep in specific verticals.

Dreamit offers a model built not only on acceleration but also on customer acquisition. The program places strong emphasis on matching startups with corporate partners, pilot customers, and industry experts. Investment amounts typically range from \$50K to \$150K, providing early-stage teams with both capital and sales support.

Vertical specialization, regulatory awareness, and clear problem-solution fit are important in the application. It is a strong choice especially for products that are suitable for enterprise sales and have a concrete use case.

SOSV (HAX, IndieBio, Chinaccelerator)

Web: sosv.com

A global VC and accelerator platform that runs multiple specialized programs. HAX focuses on hardware and robotics, IndieBio on life sciences and biotechnology, and Chinaccelerator on broader consumer and internet startups.

SOSV is known as one of the most active early-stage investors in the world. Each program provides technical mentorship, prototyping support, lab access, manufacturing supply-chain connections, and investment based on its area of expertise. It is especially strong for physical products, lab-based innovation, and startups with scientific risk.

In the application process, technical depth, team capability, and why the solution is possible now play a critical role. For founders working in hardware or biotech, it is one of the best choices because of its sector expertise and structured program content.

gener8tor

Web: gener8tor.com

One of the highest-rated accelerators, with a strong presence in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and other Midwest cities. It offers a long-term model that supports startups not only during the cohort but also afterward.

The program typically takes about 7% equity for a \$100K investment and provides founders with investor introductions, sales support, business development, and community access. Its corporate partner network is very strong, which creates an advantage especially for B2B startups and those seeking regional scale.

Traction, founder experience, and why you are a fit for the program are important in the application. gener8tor's post-program support helps alumni companies become more visible in later financing rounds.

Lemnos

Web: lemnos.vc

A San Francisco-based hardware-focused seed fund and accelerator. It supports early-stage teams building robotics, manufacturing technologies, IoT, sensor systems, and physical products.

Lemnos offers a structure that understands the unique needs of hardware startups: prototyping, manufacturing, supply chain, testing processes, and engineering-driven product development. It is known to invest at the pre-seed stage in the range of \$500K-\$1M, creating an important capital advantage for teams building physical products.

Technical depth, engineering capability, and the product's path to production stand out in the application. For founders in hardware, it provides not only capital but also strong engineering mentorship.

Mucker Capital

Web: muckercapital.com

An accelerator and seed fund based in Los Angeles. It is strong in B2B software, marketplace, and consumer tech, with especially deep ties to the West Coast ecosystem.

Mucker supports early-stage startups with approximately \$100K-\$200K investment and a 7-10% equity band. Its standout feature is founder-focused mentorship, with practical guidance on sales, product, and go-to-market. Connections in Los Angeles to media, entertainment, e-commerce, and SaaS are especially valuable.

In the application process, user growth, product repeatability, and founding team fit matter. It is a strong first stop for teams looking to leverage the West Coast network.

Pear VC

Web: pear.vc

A Silicon Valley-based seed fund and selective investment platform with the PearX accelerator program. It works with early-stage founders in enterprise software, consumer, and deep tech.

Pear VC's strength comes from its exceptional founder and mentor network, fueled by the Stanford and MIT ecosystems. The program typically offers \$250K-\$500K in investment; in addition, it provides active support with product strategy, early hiring, market validation, and preparation for later funding rounds.

Technical excellence, market size, and the founder story stand out in the application. Teams accepted into PearX enter an ecosystem with strong VC visibility and gain access to a powerful investor network in later rounds.

👉 The most critical factor in accelerator applications: **the team**. Investors look at who the team is just as much as the idea itself. If you have a co-founder, apply together. For the highest acceptance rate in accelerator applications:

- Apply to multiple programs at the same time.
- Prepare your application forms by reading the stories of previously accepted startups.
- If possible, get a referral through an alumnus.

Layer 3: Venture Capital (VC) Funds

Venture capital firms provide institutional funding for startups with strong scaling potential. While some VC firms also invest at the pre-seed and seed stages, most focus on Series A and beyond. VC firms typically invest millions of dollars in exchange for 20-30% equity and take an active role by serving on the board of directors.

For Turkish entrepreneurs, the biggest obstacle in the VC process is usually the requirement for a "warm introduction," meaning access through an introduction. Cold applications rarely succeed; that is why building a network and going through accelerators is critically important.



How to Reach an Investor? Cold vs Warm Outreach

There are two ways to reach an investor: cold and warm outreach. Research shows that applications coming through a warm introduction have a 5-10x higher acceptance rate compared to cold emails. However, there are situations where both methods work when used correctly.

Cold Outreach

When does it work?

- The investor is a perfect fit for your sector
- Your email is short, clear, and personalized
- You have strong traction or metrics

Cold Email Template:

Subject: [Company Name] — [One-sentence **value** proposition]

Hello [Name],

[Mention the investor's recent investment — show that you researched them].

We at [company name] solve [problem] **with** [solution]. [A strong metric: X users, \$Y ARR, Z% growth].

Would you be available **for** a 15-minute meeting?

[Name]

Warm Introduction

Most effective ways:

- Through accelerator alumni
- Via a mutual connection on LinkedIn
- By meeting at pitch competitions
- With referrals from other founders
- In person at conferences and events

Tools for warm intros:

- [Signal by NFX](https://signal.nfx.com): signal.nfx.com — Shows the shortest path to the investor
- [Intro.co](https://intro.co): intro.co — Paid intro service
- LinkedIn Sales Navigator: Find mutual connections

✔ **Golden Rule:** Before reaching out to an investor, read their last 5 investments, blog posts, and Twitter/X posts. Provide a clear answer to the question "Why you?". Personalization comes before everything else.

VCs Investing in Seed & Pre-Seed



First Round Capital

firstround.com — Known as one of the earliest investors in companies like Uber, Square, Notion, Roblox, and Warby Parker. At the seed stage, it typically invests with check sizes of \$500K–\$1M; but its real differentiator is not just providing capital, but a support model that accompanies the founder operationally. Its content platform, **First Round Review**, offers founders highly valuable practical content on product, management, hiring, and growth. The fund focuses less on a standard pitch and more on founders with unique insight, those who see a problem differently from others and can turn that view into a product. On the application side, cold emails are often said to be weak; the best path is warm intros from portfolio founders or visibility at events where partners speak. When they are interested, they move very quickly; so it is important to tell your story briefly, clearly, and with a strong founder thesis.



Pear VC

pear.vc — Founded by Pejman Nozad and Mar Hershenson, Pear VC is a highly influential Silicon Valley-based pre-seed fund with strong connections to the Stanford and MIT ecosystems. It typically invests \$250K–\$500K; but its key differentiator is the selective and high-quality **PearX** program. The PearX cohort is highly competitive, and the fund provides not only capital but intensive founder support that accelerates early-stage growth. Notable portfolio companies include early support for DoorDash, Guardant Health, and Branch. They are especially active in deeptech, B2B SaaS, and enterprise software. If you have Stanford/MIT ties, be sure to use them; the fund's relationship with the startup ecosystem is strengthened through those networks. The most direct application path is to join PearX via pear.vc/pearx. What matters here is not just the idea; it is your problem insight, technical depth, and why you are the right team to solve this.



Backstage Capital

backstagecapital.com — A seed fund focused on underrepresented groups, especially women, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ founders. Founded by Arlan Hamilton, this fund has opened a real door for founders with limited access to traditional VC networks; Backstage has invested in 200+ companies and also provides support through programs like the Backstage Accelerator. Arlan Hamilton building the fund from scratch, even under difficult personal circumstances, is seen as a very powerful resilience story for founders. The fund provides not only capital, but also visibility, community, and psychological safety, which makes a huge difference especially at early stages. The best approach in the application is not to hide your background, but to explain how that background gave you a unique lens on solving the problem. Being authentic, owning your story, and showing why you understand your target audience better than others is very important.



Initialized Capital

initialized.com — Co-founded by Gary Tan, this is a seed-focused fund with a very strong reputation. It usually invests \$500K–\$2M and pays special attention to technical founders and teams with strong product intuition. It is known for portfolio companies like Coinbase, Instacart, and Cruise; this shows that they can identify companies with major scalability potential at an early stage. They also have a strong YC alumni network; so if you are a YC alum or have YC connections, you should definitely use that relationship. The fund looks not only at growth stories, but also at founder quality signals and why the product is the “right solution at the right time.” In the application, you should very clearly demonstrate your technical depth, closeness to the user, and why you are the right person to solve this problem.



Founder Collective

foundercollective.com — A seed fund run by successful founders for founders, known for its founder-friendly approach. It typically invests in the \$500K–\$1M range; it has strong portfolio companies like Uber, BuzzFeed, Coupang, and PillPack. One of its most notable traits is that it asks for relatively little board control and adopts an investment style that preserves the founder's space. They advocate a “frugal fundraising” approach; that is, they point out the risks of raising more money than you actually need. At the seed stage, capital efficiency, strong unit economics, and careful use of capital are important to them. In the application, it is important to show efficiency, clear priorities, and progress instead of big spending. If you have achieved a lot with a small team, this fund sees that as a strong signal.



Precursor Ventures

precursorvc.com — One of the rare funds that can invest even when there is no product, no revenue, or even when the idea is not fully clear yet. Led by Charles Hudson, the team especially backs technical founders, first-time founders, and teams with a high learning velocity. When making an investment decision, they look at whether the founder has a *unique insight*, how honestly they express unknowns, and their capacity to learn and adapt quickly. Charles Hudson's accessibility on Twitter/X and LinkedIn makes this fund more reachable for early-stage founders. They usually write checks in the \$100K–\$500K range and are especially strong at the pre-product / pre-PMF stage. They have backed many early-stage companies in B2B SaaS and consumer. The best approach is to reach out to Charles Hudson directly with a short, concise, and thoughtful message; clearly state what you know and what you do not yet know. They prefer intellectual honesty over exaggerated claims.



Hustle Fund

hustlefund.vc — Founded by Elizabeth Yin (former 500 Startups partner) and Eric Bahn, Hustle Fund places speed, execution discipline, and founder energy at the center of very early-stage investing. The fund's investment thesis is very clear, and the team regularly shares it through blog posts, content, and social media; reading these before applying gives a major advantage. It invests not only in the U.S. but globally, runs a transparent process, and provides founders with fast feedback. They usually write checks in the \$25K–\$150K range. What they look for are founders who show “hustle,” ship very fast, and are able to pivot as they learn. They do not expect the product to be perfect in the application; instead, they want to see your pace of progress and learning loop. A short, clear, metrics-backed narrative is more effective here than a long deck. If you can prove that you are moving very quickly and using resources efficiently, you stand out.



Precede Capital

precedecapital.com — A pre-seed fund specifically designed for immigrant and underrepresented founders. It understands the practical challenges faced by international founders new to the U.S., including Turkish entrepreneurs, especially around visa processes, network access, and adapting to the local ecosystem. Their knowledge of O-1 and EB-1 options, and their ability to connect founders with immigration attorneys when needed, makes this fund not just an investor but also a navigation partner. They also have a strong network in the Turkish-American and broader immigrant founder community. Their investment thesis includes looking for the founder's ability to move between cultures and how that creates an advantage in market understanding. In the application, it is important to clearly explain your cross-cultural perspective, why you can read the local market better, and how your immigrant background gives you a strategic advantage. For this fund, “where you come from” is not a disadvantage, but often a major strength.



Lerer Hippeau

lererhippeau.com — One of the most active seed funds on the East Coast, based in NYC. It usually writes \$500K–\$1M checks and is especially strong in consumer, media, e-commerce, and B2B SaaS. Their portfolios, including Warby Parker, BuzzFeed, Casper, and Allbirds, show that they are experienced in brand building and consumer behavior. They have very strong media, marketing, and distribution connections in the New York ecosystem; so it can be a natural match for founders building in the city. The fund looks at whether the product creates pull not only technically, but also in terms of marketing and distribution. In the application, it helps to highlight your NYC network, your consumer insight, and why this market is natural for you. They especially like to see early brand signals and user love.



Collaborative Fund

collaborativefund.com — An impact-oriented seed and early-stage investment fund. It invests in companies with the potential to improve the world in areas like health, cities, money management, and children/education. Its portfolio, including Kickstarter, Lyft, Reddit, and Impossible Foods, shows that the fund cares not only about financial growth but also social benefit. If your startup has a positive social or environmental impact, Collaborative Fund can be a strong fit. The fund likes business models that carry a “good direction” as much as big markets and thinks about long-term effects. In the application, explain the social dimension of the problem, why it needs to be solved now, and how your business model makes the impact sustainable. They want to see scalable impact, not just “good intentions.”

Early-Stage Programs of Major VC Firms

Tier-1 VCs are often known for Series A and beyond; however, behind the scenes, they run separate early-stage programs, scout networks, and communities to get to know the best founders before the product is fully formed. The purpose of these programs is not only to find investment opportunities; it is to catch founders aligned with the fund's thesis early, give them visibility and connections on the path to product-market fit, and move quickly in later rounds when needed. In other words, the relationship here is different from a classic "send the pitch deck, get a decision" process: the expectation is not an immediate check, but rather to give the right signal and get on their radar. Used correctly, these programs give founders confidence, network, and momentum before capital.

Sequoia Arc

1

arc.sequoiacap.com — Sequoia's global early-stage program. A 7-week structure; open to pre-seed and seed founders, and no equity is taken for the program itself. The goal is not just to provide mentorship, but to quickly connect the founder with Sequoia's partners, founder network, and operational resources. It is highly selective and most strongly favors founders who are in search of product-market fit and have a clear problem insight. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis; getting into Arc does not guarantee a Sequoia investment, but it significantly increases visibility and the seriousness of your case in the next round. Arc companies receive \$500K–\$1M investment at the start of the program.

Bessemer Roadmap

3

bvp.com — Bessemer's early-touch and resource program focused on cloud and SaaS. One of the things that makes Bessemer strong is that they openly write what they believe; their famous **Anti-Portfolio** lists show that they prioritize a learning culture instead of hiding the big companies they missed. Roadmap is especially valuable for founders in cloud infrastructure, security, and vertical SaaS. Bessemer's *State of the Cloud* report is almost required reading for every founder working in this ecosystem. If your product has technical depth, distribution advantage, and an enterprise value proposition, Roadmap does more than simply introduce you to the fund; it also clarifies from day one whether you fit their thesis.

Google for Startups

5

startup.google.com — Not a VC; but a startup support program that offers a serious operational advantage for early-stage teams. For eligible teams, it provides up to **\$200K in Google Cloud credits**, Googler mentorship, and access to Google's partner network. It has special programs for AI startups, underrepresented founders, and climate tech teams. It takes no equity; so it is especially valuable for founders who want to reduce infrastructure costs, gain technical credibility, and access strong tools from day one. If your product will scale quickly on the cloud, this program can meaningfully reduce your burn rate.

a16z START

2

a16z.com/start — Andreessen Horowitz's program designed for pre-seed founders. It serves as a strong gateway especially for teams in AI, crypto/web3, and bio. The program takes no equity; in return, founders get access to a16z's broad network of operators, executives, and portfolio companies, special events, and access to insider resources. Getting into START means not only receiving support, but also becoming permanently visible to a16z for future investment rounds. In short, this is an "early introduction" program; the best outcomes come from teams that show clear technical advantage and strong founder conviction.

NEA New Frontiers

4

nea.com — With more than \$25B in assets, NEA is one of the largest and most established funds in the industry; New Frontiers is designed for early-stage startups focused on healthcare, life sciences, and deep tech. What makes the difference here is not only capital, but also partners with deep domain expertise and sector networks. For founders working on biotech, medtech, or health technology, NEA's connections with hospital systems, pharma, and healthcare executives create real leverage. This program creates a major advantage especially for companies with complex dynamics such as regulation, clinical validation, or long sales cycles. If the fit is right, NEA can approach you like a strategic corporate partner even at an early stage.

Microsoft for Startups Founders Hub

6

foundershub.startups.microsoft.com — Microsoft's founder program; it provides the team with up to **\$150K in Azure credits**, GitHub Enterprise, Microsoft 365, and access to Microsoft's broad partner ecosystem. No equity is taken, so it is a strong option for teams that want to preserve capital efficiency in the early stage. It is especially valuable for B2B SaaS startups selling to enterprise customers; because Microsoft's corporate relationships can sometimes serve directly as a customer door, and sometimes as a trust signal. For founders who want to accelerate cloud infrastructure, developer tooling, and enterprise distribution, this program is not just "free credits," but a real go-to-market support layer.

⚠ The best way to get noticed in these programs is not to send cold, generic emails, but to build up the right signals over time. The most effective routes are: finding warm introductions from portfolio companies, appearing at events where partners are present, engaging with their content through thoughtful and smart comments, and, if possible, being associated with the same ecosystem as the founders they invest in. On LinkedIn, simply saying "I added you" is not enough; you need to show a clear idea about the thesis they are building, measurable progress, and a compelling story about why they should talk to you now. In short, these doors open from the inside: build relationships, signal value, and then apply.

VC Research and Directory Resources

You can use the free and paid tools below to find VCs that fit your industry and stage.

Free Directories

- **Crunchbase Free:** [crunchbase.com](https://www.crunchbase.com) — Investor profiles, portfolio companies, funding rounds
- **Pitchbook (Limited):** pitchbook.com — Free access to basic VC data
- **Signal NFX:** signal.nfx.com — Free tool showing VCs' sector and stage focus
- **VC Guide:** vcguide.co — Curated list of early-stage investors
- **Visible.vc Connect:** visible.vc — Investor database, free basic plan

Paid / Premium Tools

- **Crunchbase Pro:** Monthly ~\$29 — Detailed investor searches, contact information
- **Pitchbook Pro:** Enterprise pricing — The most comprehensive database
- **Foundersuite:** foundersuite.com — Combined CRM + investor list tool
- **Airtable VC Templates:** Free VC lists prepared by the community are available

- ❏ Signal NFX is especially strong: choose your sector, see how many investors focus on that sector, and use the heat map to understand who is most active.



Layer 4: Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is the most democratic way to provide both financing and market validation at an early stage. In the US, there are two main types: product-based reward crowdfunding (Kickstarter, Indiegogo) and equity crowdfunding — investing in startup shares in exchange for equity (Republic, Wefunder). Since 2020, thanks to Regulation Crowdfunding (Reg CF) and Regulation A+ rules, anyone can buy startup shares with small amounts.

✓ When Is Crowdfunding Appropriate?

- When your product appeals to a broad audience
- When you want to validate the market
- To build a community and gain early users
- When you want to prove traction before VC
- When you want to raise funds without giving up equity (reward-based)

⚠ Things to Watch Out For

- A strong marketing strategy is essential for a successful campaign
- Campaign preparation can take 2-3 months
- Republic and Wefunder applications are selective — they do not accept every startup
- With Reg CF, a maximum of \$5M can be raised (12-month limit)
- If the campaign fails, there may be reputational risk

📌 For a successful crowdfunding campaign: secure at least 30% of your target amount before launch (friends, family, angels), prepare a strong video, and build your social media community in advance. Republic's own content team supports successful campaigns.

Crowdfunding Platforms

1

Republic

Web: republic.com

The leading equity crowdfunding platform. It operates under Reg CF and Reg A+. Both accredited and non-accredited investors can participate. A maximum of \$5M can be raised (Reg CF).

Recommended first stop for Turkish founders. Application: republic.com/raise

2

Wefunder

Web: wefunder.com

A crowdfunding platform with more than 2 million investors. Minimum investment can be as low as \$100. It offers strong tools for community building. Application: wefunder.com/raise

3

StartEngine

Web: startengine.com

A high-volume crowdfunding platform. Especially suitable for consumer-facing products. Kevin O'Leary (Shark Tank) is also associated with the platform as an advisor.

4

Kickstarter / Indiegogo

Web: kickstarter.com / indiegogo.com

Reward-based funding — you do not give away equity, but offer a product or a thank-you. Ideal for physical products, technology, and creative projects. Perfect for market validation.

Layer 5: Government Grants and Programs

U.S. federal and state governments distribute more than **\$4 billion+** in non-repayable grants to innovation-focused startups every year. Unlike VC, this funding is **non-dilutive**: you keep **100% ownership** of your company. The most important programs include **SBIR, STTR, NSF, DOE, NIH, DARPA**, and state-based technology support programs. On the eligibility side, the main criterion is being a **U.S.-registered small business with fewer than 500 employees**; for that reason, immigrant-founded startups operating through a **C-Corp** established in the U.S. can also apply. But there is a warning: applications are detailed, competition is high, and the process takes time. Still, the payoff is significant — many successful startups **finance their R&D with grants while keeping their cap table clean** and enter their VC round stronger.

\$4B+

Total Grants

Total annual SBIR/STTR grants distributed each year

83%

Phase II Transition

The transition rate from Phase I applications to Phase II (for successful applicants)

\$2M

Typical Amount

Typical SBIR Phase II grant amount (non-repayable)

11

Agency Count

Number of federal agencies participating in the SBIR program (NIH, DOD, NSF, DOE, NASA, etc.)

- ✔ Writing a grant application takes time — but once you win, you get both capital and a government-backed *proof of concept*. This works as a strong credibility signal in later VC meetings. To get started: visit [sbir.gov](https://www.sbir.gov) and identify the agency that fits your sector.

GOVERNMENT
GRANT
APPLICATION

SBIR / STTR: The Largest Grant for Technology Startups


SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) and **STTR (Small Business Technology Transfer)** are the largest and most established grant programs in the United States; more than **\$4B+** in funding is distributed each year. SBIR supports in-house R&D, while STTR requires a formal partnership with a university or research institution. Both operate in a **non-dilutive** structure: you give up no equity and make no repayments. **11 federal agencies** participate in the program — **NIH, NSF, DOE, DOD, NASA, USDA, EPA**, and others — but each agency has different focus areas, technical expectations, and application timelines; that is why choosing the right agency is critically important. A strong SBIR application often takes **3–6 months**, so starting early is an advantage. In addition, winning an SBIR often works as a strong **government validation** signal in later VC rounds and shows investors that the technology has been validated both technically and institutionally.

SBIR/STTR Stages

- **Phase I:** \$50K–\$314K (varies by agency; about \$307K for NIH, about \$314K for NSF) — a 6-month feasibility and proof-of-concept effort. The goal is to demonstrate the technical feasibility and early commercial potential of the technology. Applications are generally around **15–20 pages**; acceptance rates vary by agency, roughly between **10–25%**.
- **Phase II:** \$500K–\$2M — 2 years of full R&D and prototype development. Only **Phase I winners** can apply for this stage. The product takes real shape here; technical risk is reduced, the prototype is validated, and market readiness begins. In agencies such as **NIH**, additional **commercialization** support may also be available.
- **Phase III:** Commercialization stage — There is no federal grant in this phase; growth happens through federal contracts, private investment, or licensing. Many defense- and health-focused startups reach large enterprise customers or public procurement channels in Phase III.
- **Fast-Track:** Some agencies offer an accelerated path that combines Phase I and Phase II. Especially seen at **NIH** and **NSF**, this structure saves time for startups with strong data and a clear technical roadmap.

Agency Selection Guide

- **NSF SBIR** (seedfund.nsf.gov): One of the broadest options for software, AI, deep tech, and general technology innovation. It is often a strong starting point for early-stage and platform-focused products and is frequently seen as one of the most accessible entry points for Turkish founders as well.
- **NIH SBIR** (grants.nih.gov): The strongest program for health technologies, biotechnology, medical devices, and digital health solutions. With an annual budget of **\$1.5B+**, it has one of the largest SBIR pools. It is ideal for startups with clinical validation, patient data, or evidence of medical benefit.
- **DOE SBIR** (science.osti.gov/sbir): A strategic channel for clean energy, battery technologies, climate tech, energy efficiency, and nuclear applications. It is highly suitable for startups developing energy transition, grid optimization, or storage technologies.
- **DoD SBIR** (dodsbirsbt.entechtx.com): Strong in defense, cybersecurity, drones, robotics, and AI applications. It is one of the largest programs by total budget; it has high strategic value for startups seeking to sell into defense or enter federal use cases.
- **USDA SBIR** (nifa.usda.gov): A niche but relatively less competitive area for agricultural technology, food security, agritech, and rural innovation. It offers a good fit for solutions focused on agricultural efficiency, sensors, automation, and sustainable production.

 For eligibility: you must be a **C-Corp or LLC** registered in the U.S., have **fewer than 500 employees**, and conduct the majority of the research in the **United States**. For **STTR**, the employee majority rule can be applied more flexibly, because a university/research institution partnership is part of the program. Before applying, check sbir.gov/eligibility. Tip: professional **SBIR consultants** are available for application writing; a properly structured application can meaningfully increase your chances of success.

Other Federal and State Grants

→ Grants.gov

Web: grants.gov

It is the central database for all federal grant programs and can host **1,000+ active opportunities** at any given time. You can filter by agency, category, eligibility, and application deadline; create a free account to save your searches and receive email alerts for new listings that match your criteria. Use keywords such as **"technology"**, **"innovation"**, and **"small business"** to narrow your search. Also track upcoming but not yet open **"Forecasted"** grants so you can prepare your application in advance. It should be one of the first places technology startups research.

→ SBA (Small Business Administration)

Web: sba.gov/funding-programs

SBA offers not only grants, but also critical financing tools for small businesses. Through the **SBIC Program**, SBA-licensed investment firms provide equity and debt financing; these amounts often range from **\$250K–\$10M**. With **SBA 7(a) Loans**, you can secure low-interest loans of up to **\$5M** for working capital, equipment, or growth. The **Microloan Program** provides up to **\$50K** for early-stage businesses. In addition, **SCORE mentorship** offers free business mentoring from retired executives. There are also special resources for immigrant founders and minority-owned businesses.

→ NSF I-Corps

Web: nsf.gov/i-corps

This is the National Science Foundation's entrepreneurship and customer discovery program. It typically provides **\$50K** in support and intensive customer discovery training. It is designed for researchers and technical founders to validate the commercial potential of technology. Investors view it as a highly respected signal because it offers a disciplined approach to market validation. It is accessible across the United States through universities and regional I-Corps centers.

→ NIH STRIDES Initiative

Web: nih.gov/strides

This is the NIH program that connects health researchers and startups with commercial cloud and data resources. It provides discounted access on **AWS**, **Google Cloud**, **Microsoft Azure**, and other platforms. It is not a cash grant; however, it is an important **in-kind** support that significantly reduces infrastructure costs for biotech and health tech companies. It is especially useful for health startups that process large amounts of data.

→ MBDA (Minority Business Development Agency)

Web: mbda.gov

It directly supports minority-owned businesses, including immigrant entrepreneurs. It provides access to capital, contracts, and markets. **MBDA Business Centers** in major cities offer free consulting, grant-writing support, and connections to federal procurement opportunities. For Turkish and other immigrant founders, it can be a strong entry point for both funding and public contracts.

→ Economic Development Administration (EDA)

Web: eda.gov

EDA funds regional innovation ecosystems, tech hubs, and economic development projects. In particular, the **Build to Scale** program supports startup ecosystems and innovation accelerators; grants can reach up to **\$3M**. The **Tech Hubs** program (launched in 2023) identifies regional technology hubs and provides strong federal investment. If you operate in a designated Tech Hub region, your startup may benefit directly from ecosystem funding around you.

→ State Development Agencies

Each state has its own innovation grants, tax incentives, and financing programs; therefore, local resources should be researched separately. In **California iBank (ibank.ca.gov)**, the **iHub** program, small business loan guarantees, and technology commercialization grants stand out; the **California Energy Commission** also supports clean energy startups. With **New York Empire State Development (esd.ny.gov)**, **NY Ventures**, **StartUP NY** for university-adjacent startups, and **NY Green Bank** for climate technology are accessible. Under **Texas Economic Development (gov.texas.gov/business)**, the **Texas Enterprise Fund**, the **Texas Emerging Technology Fund**, which can provide up to **\$500K** for early-stage technology companies, and strong aerospace/energy connections are available. **Massachusetts MassTech (masstech.org)** stands out for programs supporting technology innovation and its strong biotech/life sciences network. **Florida DEO (floridajobs.org)** offers the **Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund**, innovation grants, and connections to the aerospace-defense sectors.

→ DOE ARPA-E

Web: arpa-e.energy.gov

Known as **"DARPA for energy"**, this program funds high-risk, high-reward energy technology projects. Grants are typically in the **\$500K–\$5M** range. It focuses on energy solutions that are still too early for private investment but have transformational potential. Some graduate companies later raised hundreds of millions of dollars in VC. If you are working on a breakthrough energy technology, this is one of the most prestigious and best-funded programs available.

→ USDA Rural Development

Web: rd.usda.gov

It offers grant and loan programs for businesses operating in rural areas. The **Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)** and **Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)** are especially relevant for agritech, cleantech, and rural-focused startups. If your startup serves rural communities or agricultural markets, USDA Rural Development is often an overlooked but very valuable resource.

Layer 6: Pitch Competitions and Awarded Programs

Pitch competitions and selected programs provide not only cash prizes, but also media visibility, investor access, founder networks, and credibility signals. Especially for early-stage startups, these stages are highly valuable for testing your product, strengthening your narrative, and accelerating preparation for the next funding round. Even if you do not win, being selected, becoming a finalist, or taking the stage often opens the first door with investors.

TechCrunch Startup Battlefield

techcrunch.com/startup-battlefield — offers a **\$100K cash prize** and major visibility on TechCrunch's global media platform. It is one of the world's most prestigious startup competitions; companies like **Dropbox, Mint, and Yammer** have come through this stage. The jury is typically composed of Tier-1 VCs and technology leaders. Applications open once a year; around **20 startups** are selected to pitch at TechCrunch Disrupt. Even if you do not win, being covered by TechCrunch editors creates significant PR value. In the application, a **product demo, traction**, and a clear story are critical.

MIT \$100K Entrepreneurship Competition

mit100k.org — MIT's international startup competition with a **35+ year** history. It offers a **\$100K cash prize** along with access to the MIT ecosystem and alumni network. The process typically has three stages: **Pitch, Semi-Finals, Finals**; there are also sector-specific tracks such as **Energy, Healthcare, and AI**. You do not need to be an MIT student; international founders can also apply. Finalists and winners connect directly with MIT's strong VC and founder network. It is a particularly strong showcase for teams with technical depth.

Rice Business Plan Competition

rbpc.rice.edu — the world's largest MBA startup competition and notable for its **\$1.5M+** total prize pool. **500+ teams from 42+ countries** apply, and about **40 finalists** are selected. The jury and event network consist of **300+ investors and business leaders**, making the competition not just a pitch stage but also a major networking venue. Becoming a finalist alone opens a strong door for investor meetings. It is especially valuable for startups in **energy, health, and technology**.

Hult Prize

hultprize.org — a global competition run in partnership with the UN for social ventures, with a **\$1M prize**. It attracts **100,000+ students from 120+ countries**, and each year a global issue theme is selected such as **climate, food, or health**. The process includes university campus tours, regional finals, and a global final. It is one of the world's largest platforms for student entrepreneurs. Winners receive support from the UN and Hult International Business School to scale their ventures.

SXSW Pitch

sxsw.com/pitch — the startup competition of the SXSW festival held every March in Austin. Finalists are selected in **10 categories**, and each category winner receives an award. International media attention is high; outlets like **BBC, Forbes, and Wired** follow the competition. Even if you do not win, the SXSW environment offers the opportunity to connect with hundreds of investors and founders at the same time. Applications open every year in **October-November**; preparing early is therefore an advantage.

MassChallenge Startup Competition

masschallenge.org — a non-dilutive, cash-prize global accelerator and competition platform. It runs programs in **Boston, New York, Texas, Switzerland**, and other locations; the annual total prize pool exceeds **\$3M+**. Social impact, innovation, and commercial potential are evaluated together. The application is free and the acceptance rate is higher than many other major competitions. Becoming a finalist means both a strong CV line and investor visibility. It is a very good starting point for early-stage but ambitious teams.

Startup World Cup

startupworldcup.io — a global competition with regional qualifiers in **60+ countries** and a final held in San Francisco. The grand prize offers an opportunity for **\$1M investment**. Local preliminary rounds are held in many countries, including Turkey, making it easier for international founders to enter from their own country. Startups that reach the final gain direct access to Tier-1 VCs and media in Silicon Valley. It is a strong showcase especially for companies targeting global scale.

Google for Startups Accelerator

startup.google.com — technically not a competition, but a selection-based accelerator program. There are separate programs for **AI, cloud, women founders, Black founders, and climate tech**. Selected startups receive **up to \$200K in Google Cloud credits**, mentorship from Google engineers and experts, and access to Google's global partner network. No equity is taken. Applications open several times a year; selection criteria emphasize technical depth, growth potential, and team quality. It is especially valuable for teams looking to reduce infrastructure costs and gain enterprise credibility.

Y Combinator Startup School

startupschool.org — YC's free online education program. Technically it is not a competition; however, top participants may be invited to a YC batch. Weekly group sessions, founder community access, and YC's content library are provided free of charge. It is open to global participants, including Turkish entrepreneurs. Going through Startup School before applying to YC is a strong step for both preparation and visibility.

Webby Awards Startup Category

webbyawards.com — the startup and technology categories of the Webby Awards, known as "the Oscars of the internet." Being a finalist or winning provides a strong PR and credibility signal, especially for consumer-facing products, web applications, and digital experiences. Media and investor visibility are high. Your product's design, user experience, and digital impact play an important role here.

Fast Company Most Innovative Companies

fastcompany.com/most-innovative-companies — Fast Company's annual list of the most innovative companies. It is application-based; being selected carries major media and PR value. Investors actively follow this list. It offers a strong visibility opportunity especially for early-stage startups showing remarkable growth. It is an effective platform for presenting your innovation as category-leading.

Cartier Women's Initiative

cartierwomensinitiative.com — a global business plan competition for women founders with a **\$100K prize**. Finalists are selected in **7 regions**; winners gain access to Cartier's global network and mentors. Social impact and commercial sustainability are evaluated together. It is a prestigious and high-value platform for ventures led by women founders or co-founders. It especially helps with early-stage visibility and credibility.

Echoing Green Fellowship

echoinggreen.org — a prestigious program for social entrepreneurs offering a **\$90K fellowship** and **2 years of support**. It supports early-stage entrepreneurs developing innovative solutions to global social problems. It is highly selective; the acceptance rate is around **1%**. However, those accepted gain access to a strong alumni network, long-term mentorship, and strategic support. It is one of the world's most respected programs for social impact ventures.

Seedstars World Competition

seedstars.com — a global startup competition focused on emerging markets. Local qualifying rounds are held in **80+ countries**; startups that reach the final can win up to **\$500K in investment**. It is active in Turkey as well. It offers a strong platform especially for ventures focused on emerging markets or global scaling. It is a great fit for teams that combine local market understanding with a global growth story.

i When preparing for pitch competitions, memorize your **3-minute elevator pitch**, **research the jury members in advance**, prepare clear answers for **frequently asked questions**, and perfect your **product demo**. Even if you do not win, networking with the jury and other finalists can be very valuable; these connections may matter in your next funding round. Also, applying to **multiple competitions at the same time** increases visibility, multiplies feedback, and reduces timing risk.

Layer 7: Revenue-Based Financing and Alternative Financing

Not every startup is suitable for VC or angel investment, and that is completely normal. Especially for revenue-generating startups, alternative models that provide financing without giving up equity have attracted significant interest in recent years. These models are ideal for founders who aim for sustainable growth rather than rapid growth.



Revenue-Based Financing (RBF)

You receive funding in exchange for a percentage of your future revenue, without giving up equity.

- **Clearco:** clearco.com — For e-commerce and SaaS
- **Pipe:** pipe.com — For SaaS with subscription revenue
- **Capchase:** capchase.com — ARR-based financing



Startup Loans and Credit Lines

Credit options for small businesses and early-stage companies.

- **Brex:** brex.com — Corporate card and credit designed for startups
- **Mercury:** mercury.com — Startup banking and credit options
- **Stripe Capital:** stripe.com/capital — For businesses that accept online payments



SAFE and Convertible Note

Investment instruments designed for early-stage startups, where equity is not yet determined.

- YC's SAFE template: ycombinator.com/documents
- Convertible note: customized with legal support
- Typically used with angel investors

Venture Debt

Debt financing without giving up equity. It is typically used after an equity round. Silicon Valley Bank (svb.com), Hercules Capital (htgc.com), and Western Technology Investment (westerntech.com) are prominent players in this space. It is ideal for extending runway.

Strategic Partnerships & Corporate VC

Investment arms of large companies (CVC - Corporate Venture Capital). Corporate VCs such as Google Ventures (gv.com), Intel Capital (intelcapital.com), Salesforce Ventures (salesforceventures.com), and Microsoft M12 (m12.vc) offer both capital and strategic partnerships. It is a strong option when your product integrates into the ecosystem of a large company.

Industry-Specific Investment Sources

In the investment world, "sector fit" is extremely important. Rather than approaching general VCs, reaching investors focused on your startup's industry significantly increases your chances of success. Below is a list of the most active sector-focused investors. Each fund's investment thesis, stage preference, check size, and portfolio examples differ; therefore, finding the right match—and approaching with the right message—is critical.



Healthcare and BioTech

Digital health, biotechnology, life sciences, and medical devices. These investors generally look at clinical validation, regulatory pathway, data quality, and market size.

- **Rock Health:** rockhealth.com — Digital health focused, seed and Series A. **\$500K–\$3M** checks. **Portfolio:** Livongo, Omada Health, Hims. Very strong in patient experience, clinical decision support, and digital care solutions.
- **ARCH Venture Partners:** archventure.com — Early-stage biotechnology and life sciences. Supports university spin-offs. **Portfolio:** Illumina, Juno Therapeutics. Looks for scientific depth and patent barriers.
- **GV (Google Ventures):** gv.com — Broad portfolio including life sciences. Provides access to Google network and data infrastructure. **Portfolio:** Flatiron Health, Foundation Medicine. Likes teams at the intersection of technology and healthcare.
- **OrbiMed:** orbimed.com — One of the world's largest healthcare-focused investment funds. Manages **\$500M+** in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. Active in both early and growth stages.
- **Andreessen Horowitz Bio Fund:** a16z.com/bio — a16z's dedicated arm for biotechnology and digital health. Focused on platform companies built at the intersection of technology and biology.
- **Application tip:** Clearly explain clinical outcomes, the regulatory roadmap, and your pilot institutions; show not only "technology" but also health impact and the distribution channel.



EdTech

K-12, higher education, corporate learning, and upskilling. These funds care about learning outcomes, adoption rate, distribution channel, and a clear pedagogical approach.

- **Owl Ventures:** owlvc.com — The world's largest EdTech-focused fund. Manages **\$50M+**. Active in K-12, higher education, and corporate learning. **Portfolio:** Duolingo, Coursera, Kahoot.
- **Learn Capital:** learncapital.com — Early-stage EdTech. Likes learning science- and pedagogy-focused startups; expects the product to truly generate learning outcomes.
- **GSV Ventures:** gsvventures.com — Focused on EdTech and WorkTech. Organizes the **ASU+GSV Summit**; one of the largest EdTech conferences in the world.
- **Reach Capital:** reachcapital.com — Seed fund focused on K-12 and higher education. Supports student success and equitable access themes.
- **Rethink Education:** rethinkeducation.com — Invests in EdTech startups that measure learning outcomes and are backed by data. Prefers teams that can manage school and institutional sales cycles.
- **Application tip:** Measurement matters as much as the demo. Show pilot schools, activation, retention, and learning gains in numbers; teacher/student references make a big difference.



FinTech

Consumer finance, neobanks, payments infrastructure, B2B fintech, and embedded finance. These investors want to see heavy regulation, unit economics, and data-driven growth.

- **Ribbit Capital:** ribbitcap.com — One of the most prestigious funds in fintech. **Portfolio:** Robinhood, Credit Karma, Coinbase, Nubank. Very strong in consumer finance and neobanks.
- **QED Investors:** qedinvestors.com — Fintech specialist with a global portfolio. **Portfolio:** Credit Karma, SoFi, Avant, Nubank. Likes data-driven financial services.
- **Nyca Partners:** nycapartners.com — Fintech infrastructure and B2B financial services. Strong in enterprise fintech, payments, and compliance tools.
- **Andreessen Horowitz Fintech:** a16z.com/fintech — a16z's fintech arm. Invests in crypto, neobanks, and financial infrastructure.
- **Bessemer Venture Partners Fintech:** bvp.com — Focused on fintech SaaS and infrastructure. **Portfolio:** Shopify, Toast, Brex. Emphasizes product-led growth and scalable distribution.
- **Application tip:** Clarify licensing, fraud prevention, underwriting model, and your CAC/LTV ratio; in financial products, trust and compliance matter as much as growth.



CleanTech / GreenTech

Climate technologies, energy storage, sustainable agriculture, carbon reduction, and industrial efficiency. These funds look for both impact and economic scale.

- **Breakthrough Energy Ventures:** breakthroughenergy.org — A fund founded by Bill Gates, focused on technologies fighting climate change. Manages **\$1B+**; active in energy storage, green hydrogen, and sustainable agriculture.
- **Energy Impact Partners:** energyimpactpartners.com — A strategic fund bringing together energy companies and startups. Offers pilot opportunities with utility companies.
- **Congruent Ventures:** congruentvc.com — Early-stage climate tech. Focuses on sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, and circular economy solutions.
- **Lowercarbon Capital:** lowercarboncapital.com — An aggressive climate-focused fund. Can invest across sectors from a "carbon reduction" perspective. **Portfolio:** Twelve, Charm Industrial.
- **Prelude Ventures:** preludeventures.com — Sustainability and climate tech. Has deep experience in clean energy, water technologies, and sustainable food.
- **Application tip:** Make emissions reduction, cost decreases, and scalable unit economics concrete; pilot customers and LCA/carbon metrics are highly valuable.



Consumer & E-Commerce

D2C brands, marketplace models, e-commerce infrastructure, consumer experience, and brand building. These investors look for product love, repeat purchase, and a strong distribution channel.

- **Forerunner Ventures:** forerunnerventures.com — Consumer brand and e-commerce expert. **Portfolio:** Warby Parker, Glossier, Hims, Away. Has deep expertise in consumer behavior and brand building.
- **Lerer Hippeau:** lererhippeau.com — NYC-based, media and consumer focused. **Portfolio:** Warby Parker, BuzzFeed, Casper.
- **Initialized Capital:** initialized.com — Broad portfolio, including consumer. **Portfolio:** Coinbase, Instacart. Pays close attention to early user signals.
- **Maveron:** maveron.com — Consumer-focused fund backed by Howard Schultz (founder of Starbucks). Invests in consumer brands and digital consumer experiences.
- **Coefficient Capital:** coefficientcap.com — Consumer and CPG focused. Suitable for D2C brands and e-commerce infrastructure.
- **Application tip:** Emphasize repeat purchases, clear brand language, community, and margin structure; visual identity and customer love matter in consumer funds.



PropTech & Real Estate

Real estate technology, construction tech, housing platforms, and commercial real estate software. These investors look for industry partnerships, sales channel access, and operational efficiency.

- **Fifth Wall:** fifthwall.com — The world's largest PropTech fund. Manages **\$3B+**. Builds strategic partnerships with real estate companies; provides startups with direct customer access.
- **MetaProp:** metaprop.org — NYC-based PropTech accelerator and VC. One of the most active funds for early-stage PropTech.
- **Camber Creek:** cambercreek.com — Focused on real estate technology and construction tech. Has strong connections with major real estate companies.
- **Moderne Ventures:** moderneventures.com — Invests at the intersection of PropTech, fintech, and insurtech. Uses the **Passport Program** to connect startups with enterprise customers.
- **RET Ventures:** retventures.com — Focused on multifamily housing and residential real estate tech. Has partnerships with major housing companies.
- **Application tip:** Highlight pilot agreements, ROI, operational savings, and integration ease; in real estate, the procurement cycle can be long.



DeepTech & Defense

Artificial intelligence, drones, robotics, space, cybersecurity, defense, and national security technologies. These investors examine technical barriers, government/market access, and security impact.

- **a16z Defense Tech:** a16z.com — a16z's active defense and national security fund. Looks at drones, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and space technologies.
- **Shield Capital:** shieldcap.com — Early-stage fund focused on defense and national security. Has strong Pentagon and Department of Defense connections.
- **In-Q-Tel:** iqt.org — Technology investment fund linked to the CIA. Invests in national security technologies; provides access to federal customers.
- **Paladin Capital Group:** paladincapgroup.com — Focused on cybersecurity and critical infrastructure. Strong for startups selling to government and defense sectors.
- **Lux Capital:** luxcapital.com — A science and technology focused deeptech fund. Active in robotics, biotechnology, space, and artificial intelligence. **Portfolio:** Osmo, Shypdirect, Nuro.
- **Application tip:** Clearly explain technical depth, security impact, and your financial plan's ability to withstand long sales cycles; "mission-critical" positioning is extremely important.

AgriTech & FoodTech

Sustainable agriculture, food security, alternative proteins, agricultural biotechnology, and production efficiency. This category highlights startups that solve physical-world problems and touch the supply chain.

- **Cultivian Sandbox:** cultiviansbx.com — Focused on AgriTech and FoodTech. Invests in sustainable agriculture, food security, and agricultural biotechnology.
- **S2G Ventures:** s2gventures.com — Focused on food and agriculture systems. Invests from seed stage to growth; sees the chain from production to distribution.
- **AgFunder:** agfunder.com — Global AgriTech investment platform and fund. Has portfolios in 40+ countries and reads category signals well.
- **Finistere Ventures:** finistere.com — Early-stage fund focused on AgriTech and FoodTech. Supports biotechnology and agricultural innovation startups.
- **What they look at:** Yield improvement, water use, fertilizer/pesticide reduction, distribution channel, and field pilots.
- **Application tip:** If you have validated pilots with farmers, producers, or food buyers, highlight them prominently; in hardware-software combinations, field usage is critical.

Cybersecurity

Enterprise security, application security, identity management, data protection, and threat detection. These funds usually look at technical superiority, integration ease, and major customer references.

- **CrowdStrike Falcon Fund:** crowdstrike.com — CrowdStrike's strategic investment arm. Invests in cybersecurity ecosystem startups.
- **Team8:** team8.vc — Israel-based, focused on cybersecurity and enterprise tech. Stands out with a strong network of technical founders.
- **DataTribe:** datatribe.io — Focused on cybersecurity and data science. Supports founders coming from NSA and other intelligence agencies.
- **Forgepoint Capital:** forgepointcap.com — A growth fund focused on cybersecurity. Invests from early stage through growth.
- **What they look at:** Zero trust, threat detection, IAM, cloud security, compliance, and SOC integrations.
- **Application tip:** In security products, give a clear answer to "why now?"; the pain point and sales cycle matter as much as the demo.

AI and SaaS-Focused Investors

AI and SaaS are not just popular categories today; they are also the areas where capital, distribution, and technical advantage are clustering the fastest. That is why choosing the right investor is not simply about “raising money,” but a strategic decision that determines your product’s growth velocity, credibility, and the quality of your next round. The funds below are among the strongest matches for AI-native and enterprise software startups.

<h3>Coatue Management</h3> <p>coatue.com — A Tier-1 name in technology and AI investing, Coatue, especially through its Coatue Ventures arm, invests \$500K–\$5M in seed and Series A stages. It is also very active on the growth side; therefore, if you establish a relationship early, you have a fund structure that can provide continuity in later rounds. Coatue typically evaluates companies through a “data moat” lens: how your data becomes a defensible advantage over time, how that advantage combines with product quality and distribution speed, and why it can create winner-take-all or winner-take-most dynamics matter a great deal. It has advanced technical due diligence processes; engineering quality, system architecture, scalability, data debt, and performance details are examined seriously. Portfolio: Snowflake, ByteDance, OpenSea, Figma, Instacart. Approach tip: In your deck, do not just say “we use AI”; clearly show your scalable data advantage, network effects, why your product becomes better over time, and why you can win in the long term in this market.</p>	<h3>Radical Ventures</h3> <p>radical.vc — One of the funds most focused on pure AI, based in Toronto and San Francisco. It has close ties with AI pioneers such as Geoffrey Hinton and Richard Sutton, which makes it a powerful gateway for technically deep founders. It typically invests \$1M–\$10M in seed and Series A rounds. Radical is very active in foundation model applications, AI infrastructure, enterprise AI tools, and research-led product teams. It is especially a natural fit for founders with academic publications, model development experience, benchmark results, and research backgrounds. Portfolio: Cohere, Waabi, Untether AI, MosaicML. Approach tip: Your technical publications, model performance comparisons, data set quality, and a clear answer to “why is this AI approach superior to others?” are extremely important; scientific superiority must be as convincing as the product story.</p>
<h3>Conviction Capital</h3> <p>conviction.com — A new-generation fund founded by Sarah Guo (former a16z partner) that focuses on AI-native companies. It generally invests \$500K–\$5M in seed and Series A. Conviction supports startups that do not merely use AI, but place AI at the center of the business model; in other words, AI should be the main engine of margins, distribution, and user experience in your product, not just a feature. Sarah Guo’s No Priors podcast is an important reference for understanding the fund’s AI thesis and the kinds of founders it is closest to. Portfolio: Harvey, Cognition, Character.AI, Pika, ElevenLabs. Approach tip: Show with concrete metrics how AI improves your margins, increases your distribution speed, and creates a measurable difference in user experience; instead of saying “AI is there,” answer the question: “How does AI make us faster, better, and more defensible?”</p>	<h3>Salesforce Ventures</h3> <p>salesforceventures.com — One of the largest strategic funds in corporate venture, with \$4B+ in assets under management. Salesforce Ventures not only provides capital; it also offers distribution through AppExchange, co-selling, integration opportunities, and access to enterprise customers. In investment decisions, potential for selling into Salesforce’s customer base, how well your product fits the CRM ecosystem, and how naturally it fits into enterprise workflows are decisive. Portfolio: Zoom, DocuSign, Veeva, Airtable, Databricks. It creates strategic fits especially in CRM, sales automation, customer experience, workflow automation, data integration, and analytics. Approach tip: Explain as a clear “entry point” how you will integrate with the Salesforce ecosystem, which co-selling opportunities you will open, and how you will create distribution on AppExchange; your strategic value proposition matters as much as the investment.</p>
<h3>Khosla Ventures</h3> <p>khoslaventures.com — A highly active fund with \$15B+ in assets under management, investing from seed to growth. While seed checks often start in the \$500K–\$2M range, it can take much larger positions in growth rounds. Khosla’s core approach is the “impossible bets” philosophy: investing in ideas that many consider impossible, but that would transform the world if they succeed. It is very active in AI, deeptech, cleantech, and health technologies; it is open to high-risk but high-impact ventures. Portfolio: OpenAI (early), DoorDash, Square, Impossible Foods, Stripe. Approach tip: Give a compelling answer to “why is this possible now?”: clearly lay out the triggering factors such as a technological breakthrough, cost reduction, data access, regulatory change, or a new distribution channel; then make clear why your team can win this bet.</p>	<h3>General Catalyst</h3> <p>generalcatalyst.com — With \$25B+ in assets under management, this is one of the Tier-1 funds active from seed to growth. Recently, through its “Responsible Innovation” framework, it has been especially focused on the intersection of health and AI; this makes it a strong partner for both enterprise software and regulated AI companies. Portfolio: Stripe, Airbnb, Snap, Warby Parker, Livongo, Gusto, HubSpot. It offers strong operational support, a global network, and brand power that improves the quality of later rounds. It also has an HV (Health Ventures) arm that provides a separate program and expertise for health-focused startups. Approach tip: Build your story around a large market, strong team, clear growth narrative, and a scaling mechanism; they want to see not only vision, but also the go-to-market plan, distribution speed, and enterprise buying cycle.</p>
<h3>Benchmark</h3> <p>benchmark.com — A small but extremely influential fund with only 5–6 partners who spend deep time on each investment. It usually writes \$1M–\$5M seed and Series A checks. Benchmark’s style is “few but very intense”; each partner makes only 1–2 new investments per year, which means extraordinary close work with founders. Portfolio: Twitter, Uber, Snapchat, Yelp, Instagram (early), Zillow, WeWork (early). A warm intro is considered almost mandatory. Benchmark’s value is not just capital, but the intense one-on-one relationships its partners build with founders. Approach tip: Use a short, sharp, product-centric narrative; make the “why us?” question clear in the first minute, show your growth signal simply, and if possible, build your referral chain through the right person.</p>	<h3>OpenAI Startup Fund</h3> <p>openai.fund — An AI-focused fund backed by OpenAI and Microsoft. With a size of \$100M+, this fund provides not only capital but also OpenAI API access, technical support, ecosystem connections, and the advantage of working close to the model layer. It is especially a strategic fit for products built on OpenAI models such as GPT, DALL-E, Whisper, or Sora. The fund looks not only at the market potential of the companies it backs, but also at how and why they use OpenAI technology, the fit between the model and the product, and the sustainable commercial advantage it creates. Portfolio: Harvey, Mem, Speak, Cursor, Descript. Approach tip: Clearly show how you use OpenAI technology, why you are building on these models, and what lasting commercial advantage that translates into; explain that you are not just “a thin application on top of the model,” but a product with sustainable product and distribution advantages.</p>
<h3>Sequoia Capital</h3> <p>sequoiacap.com — One of the world’s most prestigious VC funds. It was an early investor in companies like Apple, Google, Oracle, YouTube, WhatsApp, Airbnb, and Stripe. It invests from seed to growth; seed checks are often in the \$1M–\$3M range. Sequoia focuses on founders building “legendary companies” — companies that define their category. The Sequoia Arc program is an important gateway for building relationships with early-stage founders and making the company more investable. Portfolio: Apple, Google, WhatsApp, Airbnb, Stripe, DoorDash, LinkedIn. Approach tip: You need a very strong answer to “why this market, why now, and why this team?”; in addition to market size, clarify the potential for category creation, product superiority, and founder-product fit. A warm intro is almost mandatory.</p>	<h3>Andressen Horowitz / a16z</h3> <p>a16z.com — One of the world’s largest VC funds, with \$35B+ in assets under management. It has separate arms for AI, crypto, bio, fintech, consumer, and enterprise; this structure makes it easier for founders to match with the right partner and expertise. Portfolio: Coinbase, Airbnb, Lyft, GitHub, Slack, Roblox, OpenAI. Through its a16z START program, it connects with pre-seed founders and can provide early support at that stage without taking equity. It is very active in AI, enterprise software, consumer network products, and developer tools. Approach tip: Tell a story about big vision, technical superiority, and why you can become a category-defining company; not only the product, but also the distribution strategy, community impact, and platform potential must be clear.</p>
<h3>Accel</h3> <p>accel.com — One of the strongest enterprise SaaS and B2B technology investors in the global VC ecosystem. It typically invests \$1M–\$10M in seed and Series A. Accel is one of the funds that evaluates the product, sales muscle, and enterprise scaling together. Portfolio: Facebook (early), Slack, Dropbox, Atlassian, CrowdStrike, Spotify. Its strong presence in Europe and India creates an important advantage for international founders; it stands out in companies with a go-to-market strategy across different markets. Approach tip: Show your B2B sales cycle, enterprise customer acquisition strategy, channel structure, and why your product can spread quickly in the enterprise; they want to see not just technology, but sales repeatability.</p>	<h3>Lightspeed Venture Partners</h3> <p>lsvp.com — A very strong fund that is active from seed to growth and invests globally. It has \$25B+ in assets under management. It is strong in enterprise, consumer, and deeptech; especially it takes product-quality relationships and category-creation potential seriously. Portfolio: Snap, Affirm, Nutanix, AppDynamics, MuleSoft, Rubrik. It connects with early-stage founders through the Lightspeed Faction program. Approach tip: Show your product-market fit signals, growth pace, user feedback, and why you can lead in this market; package early metrics well for category leadership.</p>
<h3>Tiger Global</h3> <p>tigerglobal.com — A growth-focused fund known for fast decisions and high-volume investing. It has \$100B+ in assets under management. It is usually very active from Series B onward; however, it also evaluates early-stage opportunities in a data-driven way. Portfolio: Stripe, ByteDance, Flipkart, Nubank, Roblox. Tiger’s investment process is fast; metrics, unit economics, and market momentum matter a lot. Approach tip: Explain your strong growth metrics, clear unit economics, retention data, and scalable business model very clearly; in a fast process, you need a short but effective data-driven story.</p>	<h3>Index Ventures</h3> <p>indexventures.com — A VC with European roots but global reach. It typically invests \$1M–\$10M in seed and Series A. It is especially strong in developer tools, fintech, and consumer; it stands out as an accessible fund for global products and international founders. Portfolio: Dropbox, Slack, Figma, Robinhood, Revolut, Notion. It can be a valuable partner for teams that can bridge Europe and the U.S. Approach tip: Emphasize product quality, user love, global distribution strategy, and why your product can grow across borders; a “global by default” signal matters.</p>
<h3>Greylock Partners</h3> <p>greylock.com — A long-established VC that is very strong in enterprise and consumer technology. It usually writes \$1M–\$5M checks in seed and Series A. Reid Hoffman and the other founder-partners work very closely with founders; this adds operational guidance, not just capital, to the company-building process. Portfolio: LinkedIn, Facebook (early), Airbnb, Workday, Palo Alto Networks, Discord. Greylock especially likes companies with platform potential, network effects, and strong enterprise sales cycles. Approach tip: Show that you can create network effects, viral growth, or a repeatable enterprise sales model; explain that your product is not only good, but impactful enough to expand the category.</p>	<h3>Microsoft for Startups</h3> <p>startups.microsoft.com — Although not a direct VC, it is a very strong strategic program for AI and SaaS founders. It offers Azure credits, technical infrastructure support, access to the enterprise sales network, and integration opportunities with the Microsoft ecosystem. Especially for B2B software, AI applications, and companies seeking enterprise distribution, it can create serious leverage early on. Program benefits: Non-dilutive support, solution architecture consulting, marketplace and partner channel access. Application tip: Clearly explain how your product will scale on Azure, which integrations will open it quickly to enterprise customers, and why it is valuable to the Microsoft ecosystem.</p>
<h3>Google for Startups</h3> <p>startup.google.com — An extremely valuable early-stage program for AI-first teams. It provides cloud credits, mentorship, technical support, and access to a global community. It is especially strong for data-intensive products, AI infrastructure, and developer-facing tools. Program benefits: Google Cloud credits, technical advisory, network, and event access. Application tip: Clarify your product’s data architecture, model usage costs, and how it will work efficiently with Google Cloud; position the program support as a growth accelerator.</p>	<h3>Bessemer Venture Partners</h3> <p>bvp.com — A long-established fund known for its long-term investment thesis and broad sector coverage. It is very active in SaaS, enterprise, security, fintech, and consumer. Portfolio: Shopify, Twilio, Toast, LinkedIn, Roblox, ServiceTitan. BVP takes companies’ operational metrics and market expansion capacity seriously. Approach tip: Show stable growth, low churn, clear LTV/CAC, and your category expansion plan with concrete data; the “good business” signal is very important here.</p>
<h3>Bain Capital Ventures</h3> <p>baincapitalventures.com — Another global fund that is strong in enterprise SaaS, fintech, infrastructure, and AI. It focuses on seed and Series A; it approaches businesses with sound models and strong product depth. Portfolio: Redis, LinkedIn, DocuSign, Attentive, Snyk. It is known for strategic network strength and operational discipline. Approach tip: Clearly explain your product’s technical depth, enterprise use case, and why it creates a sustainable revenue engine; especially in B2B, the sales process must be clear.</p>	<h3>Madrona Venture Group</h3> <p>madrona.com — A fund especially strong in AI, cloud, enterprise software, and developer tools. Its proximity to the Seattle ecosystem gives it an advantage for technical founders and large tech networks. Portfolio: Snowflake, Smartsheet, Panopto, Rover. It looks at technical product quality and product-led growth signals at the early stage. Approach tip: Clearly show your product’s technical architecture, developer adoption, and why the first users love it; engineering depth stands out here.</p>
<h3>Amplify Partners</h3> <p>amplifypartners.com — A highly strong fund in infrastructure, devtools, data, AI infrastructure, and the open-source world. It focuses on more technical and product-intensive startups. Portfolio: Cockroach Labs, Confluent, Grafana, Snyk, LangChain (early). Approach tip: Technical adoption signals, developer community, open-source traction, and infrastructure cost advantage metrics are all very important; show how much your product is present in the developer’s mind.</p>	<h3>B Capital</h3> <p>bcapgroup.com — A fund that stands out with global network strength, corporate connections, and later-stage support. It is active in enterprise SaaS, fintech, healthcare, and AI. Portfolio: Bird, Ninja Van, The Credit Pros, Babylon Health, Figma. Its bridge structure between the U.S. and Asia is important for companies with international growth plans. Approach tip: Clearly explain your product’s multi-geography growth potential, corporate sales capability, and how it can accelerate through strategic partnerships.</p>

🔗 For AI startups, the strongest approach is not to chase a single fund, but to build a complementary “**stack**”: technical and ecosystem access with **OpenAI Startup Fund**, non-dilutive infrastructure support with **Microsoft for Startups**, and smart capital from a **VC** suited to your sector. This combination can keep the cap table clean in the first round while significantly increasing your product development speed. For example, the **\$150,000 Azure credit** available through **Microsoft for Startups Founders Hub**, together with the **\$200,000 Google Cloud credit** from **Google for Startups**, can finance the first **12–18 months** of infrastructure costs. That way, you can enter a real VC round later with stronger metrics and less dilution early on. There are now a total of **15 top-tier investors** listed; founders should prioritize based on **stage fit, sector fit, and warm intro** access. Rather than a broad and scattered application strategy, focusing on the most suitable **5–7 investors at the same time** is often much more effective. When applying, frame this as a “resource plan”: first credits and programs, then strategic investors, and finally the main round.



Network and Community: The Invisible Investment Engine

A large part of the investment world in the U.S. works through **personal relationships**. A "warm introduction" — being introduced by someone trusted — is far more effective than a cold application. For Turkish-speaking founders, the right communities and events are the fastest doorway to investors.

🤝 Offline Networking

- Attend startup conferences regularly
- Join local meetup groups (meetup.com)
- Go to university entrepreneurship events
- Attend Demo Days as an audience member
- Work from coworking spaces (WeWork, Industrious)
- Ask for invitations to accelerator alumni events

💻 Online Networking

- Be active on LinkedIn every day
- Build in public on Twitter/X
- Join startup Slack communities
- Launch your product on Product Hunt
- Join the Indie Hackers (indiehackers.com) community
- Create an active profile on AngelList

- ✅ The strongest networking strategy: help others. Make a customer introduction for a founder, introduce an interesting startup to an investor, give feedback to a founder. Be the giver — it will definitely come back to you.

Communities and Networks Especially for Turkish Entrepreneurs



Turkish American Startup Ecosystem

The most active network of Turkish entrepreneur communities in the U.S. Search for the LinkedIn groups "Turkish Entrepreneurs in America" and "Türk Girişimciler." It organizes mentor connections, investor introductions, and community events.



Turkish University Associations

Turkish student and alumni associations at universities like MIT, Stanford, and Harvard are a valuable source for entrepreneurial networking. Follow the MITALUMNI Turkish network and the Stanford Turkish Student Association.



Turkish Entrepreneur Slack/Discord Groups

Private Slack and Discord groups such as "Turkish Founders" and "Türk Girişimciler ABD" are active platforms for quick Q&A, investor introductions, and resource sharing. Search for these groups on LinkedIn or ask existing Turkish entrepreneurs for an invitation.



Endeavor Turkey & Global Network

endeavor.org — A global organization that supports high-impact entrepreneurs. The Turkey office is active. It is a selection-based program; if accepted, you gain access to a global mentor network and investor connections.



Global Turkish Angels (GTA)

A network formed by angel investors of Turkish origin. It helps you connect with Turkish angels in both Turkey and the U.S. Follow the "Global Turkish Angels" page on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn and Online Networking Strategy

LinkedIn is the primary platform for both research and communication in the U.S. investment world. Used correctly, it allows you to connect directly with investors.

Profile Optimization

- Your headline: "[Industry] Startup | [Solution] | Seed Stage"
- About section: Problem + Solution + Traction + CTA
- Be sure to include your startup in the Experience section
- Upload your pitch deck or demo video to the Media section

Outreach Strategy

- Review the target investor's portfolio companies
- Add a personalized note to the connection request
- Do not pitch in the first message — build a connection
- Ask for an introduction through a mutual connection
- Follow the investor's posts with thoughtful comments

📌 LinkedIn Premium Career or Business plan provides direct access via "InMail." Although it costs about \$40-60 per month, it can be valuable for reaching the right investor.

X (Twitter) Strategy

Follow Investors

Follow leading investors such as Marc Andreessen (@pmarca), Paul Graham (@paulg), Naval Ravikant (@naval), and Elad Gil (@eladgil). Increase your visibility by making thoughtful comments.

Build in Public

Share your startup's progress publicly. Weekly metrics, what you've learned, and honest updates attract investors' attention. Use the #buildingpublic hashtag.

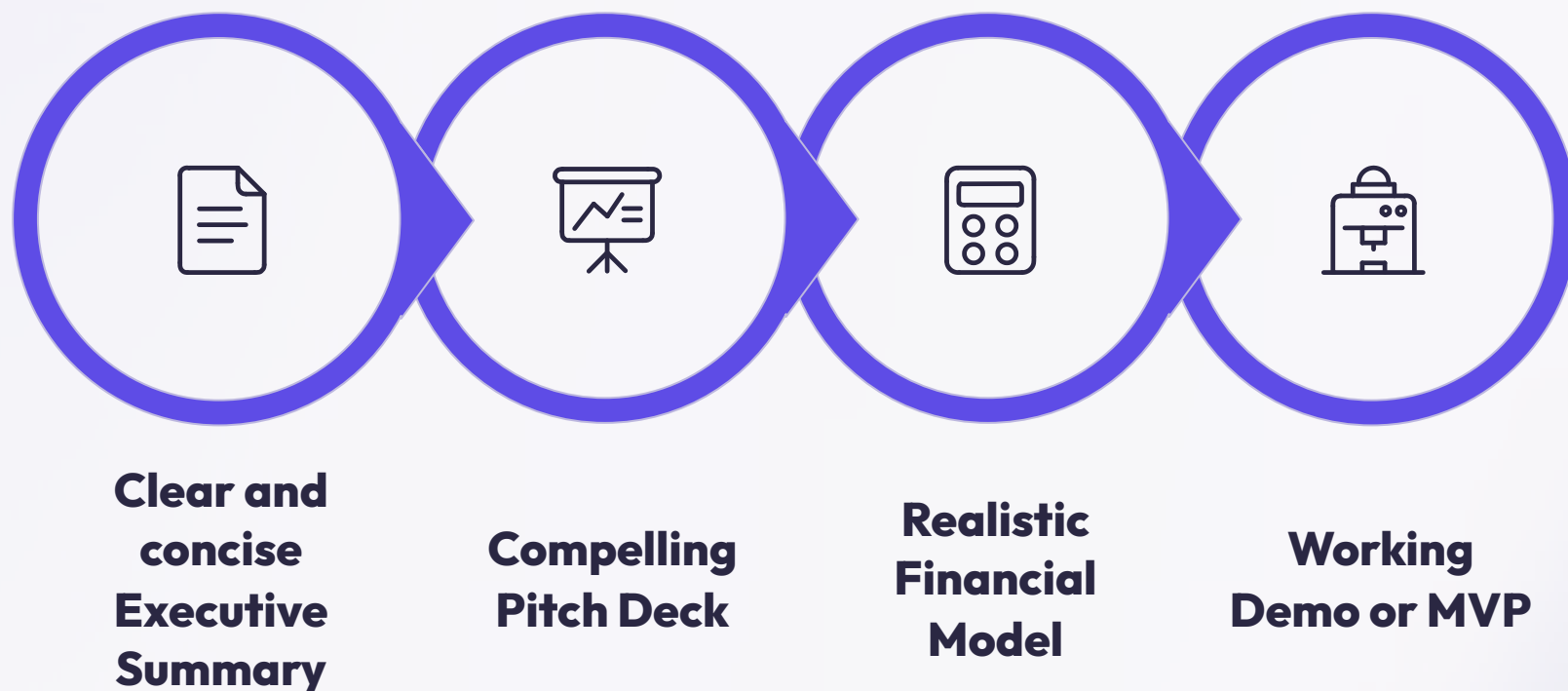
Twitter/X Spaces

Join live audio events on startup and investment topics. Participating as a speaker increases your visibility.

✅ The golden rule of online networking: give value first, then ask. Share the investor's content, answer their questions, and contribute to the community. Become a recognized person before pitching.

Before Contacting Investors: Preparation Checklist

Many founders lose funding not because their idea is weak, but because they appear unprepared. First impressions are often the last impressions. These materials are not just documents; they signal how you think, how you execute, and whether you can manage the capital entrusted to you.



These four materials tell investors different things: the executive summary says, “This founder understands the problem and thinks clearly”; the pitch deck sends the message, “This team tells a compelling story”; the financial model signals, “This founder knows the numbers and is realistic”; and the demo or MVP says, “This product is real — not just an idea.”

⚠ The four questions investors ask in the first email and first meeting are always the same: **(1) Is the problem real and big? (2) Why does the solution work now? (3) Why is this team able to do this work? (4) Where will the money go and when will it come back?** Your first email should not exceed 5 sentences; the problem, solution, traction, team, and what you want should all be clear in a single paragraph. Remember: investors receive 50-100 emails a day; if you cannot capture their interest in the first 10 seconds, they will not read further.

One-Pager / Teaser

A 1-page summary sent before the pitch deck. Its purpose is to capture the investor's attention and get a meeting; not to do the main persuading. It should include: problem (1 sentence), solution (1 sentence), market size (TAM/SAM/SOM), traction (strongest metric), team (why you?), amount of investment requested, and use of funds. It should be at most 1 page; preferably send it as a PDF. It can be prepared quickly in Canva or Notion. Tip: Show your one-pager to a friend — if they can understand what you do in 30 seconds, you're on the right track.

Cap Table

A critical document showing who owns how much equity in the company, which funding rounds have been completed, and the current dilution status. Investors will always request this during due diligence; a messy, unclear, or outdated cap table can be a serious reason for rejection. You can create one for free with Carta (carta.com) — it is the industry standard for both cap table and SAFE/convertible note management. Tip: Founder shares should be subject to a vesting schedule (usually 4 years with a 1-year cliff). Investors do not want to invest without seeing vesting.

Data Room

A folder of documents that investors will access for due diligence. Core contents: company formation documents (Certificate of Incorporation, Bylaws), financial statements (P&L, cash flow, balance sheet), customer contracts, IP documents (patents, trademarks), employee agreements, and previous financing documents. It can be set up using Google Drive, Notion, or Docsend; especially Docsend lets you see which pages investors spend time on. Tip: Prepare your data room in advance; saying “I’ll send it in a week” when due diligence starts damages trust.

References

A list of people who know you and can vouch for your credibility. The strongest references are: current customers (those who use and benefit from your product), industry experts (domain credibility), and previous investors or mentors (execution credibility). Tip: Inform your references in advance; they should not be caught off guard when an investor calls. A bad reference call can ruin a good pitch. Add the reference list to the data room, but do not share it unless the investor asks.

Traction: What Investors Are Really Looking For

Investors see dozens of great ideas every day; what moves them is traction — in other words, concrete proof that others also see this problem as important and that your solution works. Traction does not have to be perfect; but it should clearly show the direction of growth. YC's minimum growth rate at the seed stage is 10% per month; the best companies often grow 20-30% per month. Getting investment without traction is not impossible, but it is much harder; that is why producing a measurable signal as early as possible is critical.

Which Metrics Matter?

Pre-Revenue:

- **Active user count (DAU/MAU):** Daily active / monthly active user ratio. If DAU/MAU is 20%+, it signals strong engagement; in a good B2C product, 25-40% is targeted, and in very strong products like Facebook, this ratio can reach 65%.
- **User growth rate:** Weekly or monthly growth. YC wants to see momentum like 10%/week minimum; the best companies can grow 15-20%/week. Organic growth is far more valuable than paid growth because it shows real demand.
- **Retention rate (D1/D7/D30):** Day 1, day 7, and day 30 user retention rates. If D30 retention is 40%+, it is very strong; most products drop to 10-20% by day 30. Retention shows whether the product is “worth coming back to after the first try.”
- **NPS (Net Promoter Score):** The likelihood that users will recommend the product to others. 50+ is good, 70+ is excellent. If NPS is low, growth may be inflated by marketing but will not be sustainable; products that are not recommended do not scale organically.
- **Waitlist:** Building a waitlist before launch is both traction and a marketing channel. A waitlist of 1,000+ people, especially before the product is live, is a serious pre-launch signal.

Revenue Stage:

- **MRR / ARR:** Monthly/Annual Recurring Revenue. At the seed stage, \$10K-\$50K MRR is considered a strong signal; at Series A, \$100K+ MRR is typically expected. Recurring revenue shows how predictable the business is.
- **MoM growth rate:** Monthly growth percentage. 15-20% MoM growth attracts investor interest even if the company is still in a ramen-profitable stage. Continuity of growth is more valuable than one-time sales.
- **CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost):** The total cost to acquire one customer. Keeping CAC under control shows that growth is not being bought. Low CAC + high LTV is the foundation of a healthy business model.
- **LTV (Customer Lifetime Value):** The total revenue a customer generates over their lifetime. The LTV/CAC ratio should be 3x+; 5x+ is very strong. High LTV makes marketing spend meaningful.
- **Churn rate:** Monthly customer loss. For B2B SaaS, 2-3%/month is acceptable; under 1% is excellent. High churn quietly kills even the fastest-growing companies because customers are continuously lost.
- **Gross margin:** Gross profit margin. For SaaS, 70-80%+ is targeted. Low margins make scaling difficult; even if revenue grows, profitability becomes harder.

What Can You Do Without Traction?

- **LOI (Letter of Intent):** Get letters of intent from potential customers. Even if they are not paid, getting a written yes to the question “would you buy this if the product were ready?” is a strong signal. 5-10 LOIs show market validation to investors.
- **Pilot customers:** Even if unpaid, get your first 10-20 active users and collect regular feedback from them. “I have 10 users and all of them use it every day” is much stronger in investors' eyes than an abstract idea.
- **Waitlist:** Build a waitlist before launch. You can grow organically through Product Hunt, Twitter/X, and LinkedIn. A waitlist of 500-1,000 people is a serious pre-launch signal.
- **Partnerships:** Sign pilot agreements or MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with companies in the industry. A pilot agreement with a Fortune 500 company signals both market access and credibility to investors.
- **Expert validation:** Get reference letters from industry experts, former executives, or academics who validate your product. This is especially valuable in deeptech and healthcare because trust is not purchased; it is verified.
- **Pre-orders:** Collect pre-orders before the product is ready. Whether through Kickstarter or direct sales, showing that people are ready to pay is one of the strongest traction signals.
- **Press / Media coverage:** Being featured in TechCrunch, Product Hunt, industry blogs, or local media provides visibility and credibility. Saying “we were featured in X media” adds access and momentum to the pitch.

5-10x

Likelihood of receiving investment for applications that come through a warm intro versus a cold email (verified industry data)

20%/mo

The average monthly growth rate shown early by YC's best portfolio companies

3x LTV/CAC

The minimum LTV/CAC ratio investors look for in a healthy business model

D30 40%+

The day 30 retention target for a strong consumer product

Pitch Deck: The 10-Slide Golden Formula

The legendary investor Guy Kawasaki's "10-20-30 rule" and Y Combinator's own templates are the most widely accepted pitch deck formats in the U.S. Here are the 10 essential slides every investor wants to see:

1

Problem

Clearly, concretely, and compellingly define the problem you are solving.

2

Solution

Show how your product or service solves the problem.

3

Market Size (TAM/SAM/SOM)

State the total market size and the segment you are targeting.

4

Product / Demo

Show your product. Screenshots, video, or a live demo are preferred.

5

Business Model

Explain clearly how you will make money.

6

Traction

Show whatever you have — user numbers, revenue, growth rate.

7

Competition

Know your competitors and prove your unique advantage.

8

Team

Why are you the right team to bring this idea to life? Highlight your background.

9

Financials

3-year revenue projections, core assumptions, and unit economics.

10

The Ask

How much money are you asking for, what will you use it for, and what milestones will you target?

Free Resources for Preparing a Pitch Deck

YC Pitch Deck Template

Web: ycombinator.com/library — Y Combinator shares the best pitch deck examples and template guide it accepts, for free. Start here.

DocSend Pitch Deck Library

Web: docsend.com/blog/startup-deck-resources — Review real pitch decks from famous companies like Airbnb, Uber, and LinkedIn. A free reference resource.

Canva Startup Templates

Web: canva.com/presentations/pitch-deck — Professional-looking free pitch deck templates. No design skills required.

Slidebean

Web: slidebean.com — AI-powered pitch deck creation tool. Enter your content and let it automatically create the design. Starts at about \$16/month.

PitchDeckHunt

Web: pitchdeckhunt.com — Browse the original pitch decks of over 100 successful startups for free. Filterable by industry.

Investor Meeting: What to Say, What to Ask?

The first investor meeting is not a presentation, it is a conversation. The most common mistake is founders talking too much and listening too little. The best founders manage this meeting like a discovery session: they come prepared, ask smart questions, and leave the investor with this feeling: **"I want to talk to this person again."** The meeting usually lasts 30-60 minutes; the first 10 minutes are critical — because the investor forms their first impression in that window.

Questions Investors Will Use to Evaluate You

- "Why are you the right person to solve this problem?" — Your answer might be "because I've experienced this problem" or "because I've worked in this field for 10 years." The investor is looking for a concrete reason why you can solve this problem better than others. Domain expertise, special data access, a unique network, or technical superiority — at least one of these should be clear.
- "How big is the market?" — Know the difference between TAM, SAM, and SOM. Investors often want to see a \$1B+ TAM. But more importantly, you need to be able to explain how you calculated it. Instead of "the market is \$50B according to Google," take a bottom-up approach: "There are Y companies in X countries, each paying Z dollars = a \$XB market."
- "What have you done so far?" — Highlight your strongest metric: user count, revenue, growth rate, pilot customers, or LOIs. Even if the number is small, direction matters: "Three months ago we had 0 users, now we have 500 active users and are growing 30% month over month" is a powerful statement.
- "How will you spend the money?" — Vague answers lose trust. Be specific: "We're raising \$1.5M for 18 months; 60% engineering (3 people), 25% sales and marketing, 15% operations. During this period, we aim to reach \$500K ARR." Investors want to see where the money goes and when it will come back.
- "What do you want to achieve in 18 months?" — Give concrete, measurable goals: user count, revenue, product features, market expansion. Instead of "we want to grow," say things like "\$500K ARR, 50 enterprise customers, active in 3 countries."
- "Why can't your competitors surpass you?" — Be honest but strong. Real moats: network effects, data advantage, switching costs, brand, regulatory licenses, or technical patents. Saying "there are no competitors" signals naivety; there is always an alternative.
- "Why is your team able to do this?" — Explain founder-product fit clearly. A technical founder + sales founder combination may be ideal. Acknowledge the missing role, but also explain how you'll fill that gap.

Questions You Should Ask

- "How many portfolio companies do you have in this sector, and how do you work with them?" — If there are overlapping portfolio companies, a conflict of interest risk arises. It also helps you understand whether the fund truly has sector expertise.
- "How does the investment decision process work, and how many partner approvals are required?" — Some funds decide in 2 weeks, others take 3 months. Knowing this directly affects how you manage your pipeline and follow-up plan.
- "How do you support portfolio companies after investment?" — Critical for understanding whether they are "active" or "passive" investors. Ask for concrete examples such as hiring, customer introductions, or support for the next round.
- "What is your typical follow-on investment policy?" — Do they use pro-rata rights? Do they invest in later rounds too? This question shows how the long-term relationship will be shaped.
- "What is your biggest concern about this round?" — A bold but very valuable question. It helps you learn the investor's concerns and gives you a chance to address them during or after the meeting.
- "Are you actively investing right now?" — Some funds may not be making new investments. Learning this early prevents wasted time.

- ✔ Take notes during the meeting — it shows that you are prepared and that you take what the investor says seriously. Referring to these notes in your follow-up thank-you email makes a strong impression.

Post-Meeting Process

Within 24 Hours

Send a personalized thank-you email. Don't use a template; reference a specific topic discussed in the meeting: "Thank you for sharing your experience in the healthcare sector — the X point you mentioned was very valuable for us." Attach the updated pitch deck and any new traction data if available. Keep the email to no more than 5-7 sentences.

2-4 Weeks

If there is silence, follow up politely. Approach it with something like, "Is there any additional information I can provide to help with your decision process?" Never ask "what do you think?" — it creates pressure. Instead, add value: share a relevant article, industry data, or a new development.

Within 1 Week

Research and send answers to any questions you couldn't answer in the meeting. Share any new customer, pilot agreement, or metric. A sentence like "Since we spoke last week, X has happened" shows momentum and makes progress feel real.

If You Get a No

Don't burn bridges after a rejection. Ask, "At what stage or with what metrics would you reconsider?" — this is both instructive and keeps the door open. Add the investor to your monthly update list. "No" applies for today; in 6 months, with traction, it may become "yes." Many great investments came from the first rejected meetings.

- ✔ The best founders see every investor meeting as a learning opportunity — even rejection tells you what to improve. Keep a simple CRM (for example, a Notion table) with fields for date of contact, stage, feedback, and next action. Doing regular follow-ups with real updates — not spam — is what separates funded founders from unfunded ones.

Critical Mistakes Made in the Investment Process

Many founders fail to raise investment despite having a great idea because of avoidable mistakes. Read this list carefully and protect yourself from these traps.

✗ Sending Mass Emails to Everyone

Unpersonalized emails that start with "Dear Investor" are deleted unread. Send each investor a customized, well-researched message. Fewer but higher-quality outreach efforts are always more effective.

✗ Asking for an NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement)

Investors do not sign NDAs during the application stage. This request is seen as one of the clearest signs of inexperience and is an immediate reason for rejection. It is the execution and the team that are protected, not the idea.

✗ Asking for an Unrealistic Valuation

Asking for a \$50M valuation with no traction undermines your credibility. Research industry norms; at the early stage, a \$1-5M pre-money valuation is within a reasonable range.

✗ Focusing on a Single Investor

The investment process should be run in parallel. Meeting with 20-50 investors at the same time creates competitive pressure and eliminates the risk of relying on just one rejection.

✗ Claiming There Are No Competitors

Saying "we have no competitors" shows that you have not done your market research. Every startup has direct or indirect competitors. Know your competitors and clearly explain your differentiation.

✗ Approaching the Wrong Investor

Not every investor invests in every sector. Pitching a SaaS product to a healthcare VC or a B2B software product to a consumer VC is a waste of time. Before applying, research the investor's last 10 investments.

✗ Going to the Meeting Without a Financial Model

Saying "we don't have a financial model yet" shows that you are not taking your business seriously. Even a simple 3-year revenue projection gives investors confidence. It is enough to be able to explain your assumptions.

✗ Not Following Up

Not sending a thank-you email within 24-48 hours after the meeting is a big mistake. See every meeting as the start of a relationship. Even if investors say "no," they may still provide a reference later.



Special Resources for Immigrant Founders

If you are an immigrant in the U.S., you may have access to additional support and special programs in both legal and financial matters. Immigrant founders are an important part of the U.S. tech ecosystem — the founders of companies like Google, eBay, and Yahoo are of immigrant origin.

Funds and Support for Immigrant Entrepreneurs



Unshackled Ventures

unshackled.vc — A VC dedicated to foreign-born founders dealing with visa issues. It also provides support for company formation and visas. It is the most active immigrant-focused VC in the US.



ImmigrationVC

immigrationvc.com — A resource hub for immigrant founders. They compile information such as which visas can be used to found a startup and which VCs invest in immigrants.



Immigrant Founder Program (USCIS)

uscis.gov — EB-2 NIW (National Interest Waiver) and O-1 visas are the most suitable work permit options for immigrants starting startups. Detailed information is available on the USCIS website.



Global Founders Capital

gfc.vc — A global VC that invests in international founders. It is known to include Turkish entrepreneurs in its portfolio.

⚠ Before starting a startup in the US, consult an immigration lawyer. Your visa type may affect your ability to work and own a company. Use the AILA (aila.org) directory to find lawyers who offer a free initial consultation.

Startup Law: Essential Steps and Free Resources

Before raising investment, your company's legal foundation must be solid. Investors review company documents, cap tables, and contracts during due diligence. Being unprepared on these matters can delay or completely block funding.

Required Legal Steps

- Form a Delaware C-Corp (preferred by investors)
- Create a cap table (equity table)
- Sign founder equity vesting agreements (4 years, 1 year cliff)
- Sign IP (intellectual property) assignment agreements
- Prepare SAFE or convertible note templates

Free Legal Resources

- **Clerky:** clerky.com — Delaware formation, ~500\$
- **Stripe Atlas:** stripe.com/atlas — Automated US company formation
- **SCORE:** score.org — Free business advisors (volunteer mentors)
- **Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts:** Free legal support for creative entrepreneurs
- **YC Documents:** ycombinator.com/documents — Standard SAFE templates free

Company Formation Steps

01

Form a Delaware C-Corp

Form it online with Stripe Atlas (stripe.com/atlas) or Clerky (clerky.com). Cost: ~500-1000\$. Time: 1-2 weeks. The vast majority of investors require a Delaware C-Corp.

03

Open a Startup Bank Account

Mercury (mercury.com) or Brex (brex.com) offer startup-specific digital banking. There is no minimum balance requirement, and they provide special benefits for founders.

02


Obtain an EIN (Tax ID)

Apply online for free through the IRS (irs.gov). It is required to open a bank account and hire employees. Time: instant or 1-2 weeks.

04

Prepare Essential Contracts

Founder agreement, IP assignment agreement, and employee confidentiality agreement (NDA). You can access standard templates for free through Clerky or Bonterms (bonterms.com).

 Your visa status may affect company ownership and work authorization. Consult an immigration lawyer before forming the company. You can find lawyers offering a free initial consultation through AILA (aila.org).

Startup Conferences and Investor Events

In-person meetings are far more effective than digital outreach. Being present at the right conferences allows you to meet dozens of investors in a single day and become integrated into the ecosystem. The events below are the most important gathering points in the U.S. startup world.

January — CES (Las Vegas)

ces.tech — The world's largest trade show for technology products. Startup area and pitch competitions are available.

1

2

March — SXSW (Austin)

sxsw.com — Technology, media, and entrepreneurship. Thousands of investors and mentors. The pitch competition requires a separate application.

3

May — TechCrunch Disrupt

techcrunch.com/events — The year's biggest startup event, featuring Startup Battlefield. Based in San Francisco.

4

June — Collision Conference (Toronto/US)

collisionconf.com — North America's fastest-growing technology conference. 35,000+ attendees, hundreds of investors. Apply for the startup program at alpha.collisionconf.com.

5

September — Web Summit (Lisbon + NY)

websummit.com — Global scale, 70,000+ attendees. The startup program is very active.

6


November — Slush (Helsinki + US)

slush.org — Nordic, but U.S. investors also attend in large numbers. Early-stage focused.

7

Year-Round — Meetup.com Events

meetup.com — Join weekly startup, founder, and investor meetups in your city. Look for groups like "Startup Founders," "Angel Investors," and "Tech Entrepreneurs." Free and accessible.

 If your conference budget is limited: attend as a volunteer (many conferences give volunteers free tickets), ask for a student discount, or watch for early-bird pricing. Before the conference, schedule meetings with attending investors via LinkedIn — this is the most valuable strategy.

Quick Start: 90-Day Plan

You need a systematic roadmap to use all these resources. The 90-day plan below summarizes the most efficient starting strategy for an entrepreneur starting from zero.

1

Days 1–30: Core Preparation

- Prepare your pitch deck (10–12 slides)
- Write a one-pager / executive summary
- Prepare an MVP or demo
- Form a Delaware C-Corp (with Stripe Atlas or Clerky)
- Create an AngelList / Wellfound profile
- Compile your first list of 50 target investors (with Crunchbase)
- Prepare a financial model (3-year projections)

2

Days 31–60: Outreach and Applications

- Send personalized outreach emails (5–10 per day)
- Apply to at least 3 accelerators (YC, Techstars, 500 Global)
- Register for 1–2 pitch competitions
- Actively expand your LinkedIn network
- Collect references and testimonials from first users
- Schedule a free mentor meeting through SCORE
- Apply to angel groups (through Gust)

3

Days 61–90: Meetings, Iteration, and Closing

- Evaluate investor meetings and improve the pitch
- Send follow-ups within 24 hours after every meeting
- Prepare a data room (for due diligence)
- Review the first term sheet offer with a lawyer
- Keep parallel conversations going (never rely on just one investor)
- Set traction and metric goals for the next round

Valuation and Term Sheet: What You Need to Know

When you receive an offer from an investor, a preliminary agreement document called a "term sheet" arrives. Understanding the terms in this document helps you make a fairer deal.

Term	Description	Things to Watch For
Pre-money Valuation	Company value before investment	Do not accept an overly low valuation; research industry norms
Post-money Valuation	Company value after investment	Pre-money + investment amount = post-money
Pro-rata Rights	The right to invest in future rounds	Favorable to investors, but it also protects you
Liquidation Preference	Who gets paid first in a company sale	1x non-participating is reasonable; more than that is dangerous
Anti-dilution	Share protection in a down round	Broad-based weighted average is considered reasonable
Board Seat	Representation on the board of directors	Protect founder control in the early stage

 When you receive a term sheet, be sure to work with a startup law attorney. Any clause you do not understand can lead to major problems later.

Due Diligence Process: What Does the Investor Ask?

After you receive a term sheet, the investor starts the 'due diligence' process. In this process, every aspect of your company is reviewed. Being prepared speeds up this process and builds trust. The average due diligence process takes 2-8 weeks.

01

Legal Review (Legal DD)

Company formation documents, stock certificates, cap table, employee agreements, IP ownership, and existing contracts are reviewed. Having your Delaware C-Corp documents complete is critical.

02

Financial Review (Financial DD)

Bank statements, income-expense statements, burn rate, runway, and financial projections are reviewed. Keep your accounting organized regularly with Quickbooks or Bench.

03

Technical Review (Technical DD)

The product's technical infrastructure, code quality, scalability, and security vulnerabilities are evaluated. Open-source dependencies and license compliance are also checked.

04

Market and Competitive Analysis


Market size (TAM/SAM/SOM), the competitive landscape, and growth potential are evaluated. The investor also conducts independent market research.

05

Reference Calls

The investor may speak with your customers, former employees, and people who know you. Inform your references in advance.

Document	Why Is It Important?	Where Can It Be Obtained?
Cap Table	Shows the ownership structure	Carta (carta.com)
Incorporation Docs	Proves the company's legal existence	Delaware Secretary of State
IP Assignment	Shows that the intellectual property belongs to the company	Prepared with a lawyer
Customer Contracts	Proves the reality of revenue	Your existing contracts
Financial Statements	Shows financial health	Accountant / Quickbooks

 Do not hide any information during due diligence. Problems that emerge later can cancel the investment or lead to legal liability. Transparency is always the best strategy.

Free Education and Mentorship Resources

While preparing for the fundraising process, there are high-quality and completely free resources available to strengthen your theoretical knowledge. By actively using these resources, you can both increase your knowledge and gain investor confidence.



Y Combinator Startup School

Web: startupschool.org

Completely free, one of the world's best startup education programs. Access lecture videos from legendary names like Paul Graham and Sam Altman. When completed, you become part of YC's mentor network.



How to Start a Startup (Stanford)

Web: startupclass.samaltman.com

Recordings of the lecture series given at Stanford University. Talks by names like Sam Altman, Peter Thiel, and Marc Andreessen can be watched for free.



SCORE Mentorship

Web: score.org

Free mentoring from more than 15,000 volunteer businesspeople. You can arrange one-on-one meetings with retired CEOs, investors, and industry experts.



First Round Review

Web: review.firstround.com

First Round Capital's free library of articles and guides for founders. In-depth content on fundraising, team building, and product development. One of the most valuable free resources in the startup world.



NFX Essays

Web: nfx.com/essays

Strategic articles written by NFX VC for founders. Practical guides on network effects, investor relations, and growth strategy. Completely free.



SBA (Small Business Administration)

Web: sba.gov

U.S. Small Business Administration. Free business plan templates, financing guides, and one-on-one support through local counseling centers (SBDCs). There is a free SBDC office in every state.

All Resources: Quick Reference Table

We've collected all the resources shared in this guide into a single reference point. Go directly to the relevant platform based on your stage and needs.


Category	Platform / Resource	Website
Angel Investor	AngelList / Wellfound	wellfound.com
Angel Investor	Gust	gust.com
Angel Investor	Angel Capital Association	angelcapitalassociation.org
Accelerator	Y Combinator	ycombinator.com/apply
Accelerator	Techstars	techstars.com/entrepreneurs
Accelerator	500 Global	500.co/founders
Accelerator	MassChallenge	masschallenge.org
Crowdfunding	Republic	republic.com/raise
Crowdfunding	Wefunder	wefunder.com/raise
Grant	SBIR/STTR	sbir.gov
Grant	Grants.gov	grants.gov
VC Directory	Signal NFX	signal.nfx.com
VC Directory	Crunchbase	crunchbase.com
Pitch Competition	TechCrunch Battlefield	techcrunch.com/startup-battlefield
Education	YC Startup School	startupschool.org
Mentorship	SCORE	score.org
Immigrant-Focused	Unshackled Ventures	unshackled.vc
Legal	Stripe Atlas	stripe.com/atlas
Outreach	Signal NFX	signal.nfx.com
Outreach	Foundersuite	foundersuite.com
Accelerator	Founder Institute	fi.co/apply
Accelerator	Antler	antler.co
Alternative Financing	Clearco (RBF)	clearco.com
Alternative Financing	Pipe (SaaS)	pipe.com
Pitch Competition	Startup World Cup	startupworldcup.io
Education	First Round Review	review.firstround.com
Education	NFX Essays	nfx.com/essays
Legal	Clerky	clerky.com
Banking	Mercury	mercury.com
Banking	Brex	brex.com
Due Diligence	Carta (Cap Table)	carta.com



Final Word

At some point, knowledge is enough. The greatest risk is staying inactive while waiting for perfect preparation. The U.S. startup ecosystem is one of the most dynamic and accessible ecosystems in the world — but you are the one opening the door to that ecosystem.

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