

Hey founder,

What's your
dream milestone?

/ Let's make it happen!



Founded

BIG DREAMS & BOLD AMBITIONS

Every startup journey is tough, and it's packed with highs and lows. You'll face plenty of hurdles that test your determination, but you'll also find moments of success that remind you why you started in the first place. Think about landing your very first paying customer, successfully closing that nerve-wracking funding round, or finally experiencing that 'eureka' moment when your scalable business model clicks into place. These moments are crucial, so crucial, we call them Founder Milestones. Our role isn't to take over your journey, but rather to support you as you navigate these milestones. We're here to help you keep focus, stay consistent, and grow steadily, because even the most successful founders don't build companies all alone.

So keep dreaming big and daring to have bold ambitions. That's the Founder spirit that turns visionary ideas into world-changing realities.

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MEET YOUR COMMUNITY LEADS:

YOUR SUCCESS IS THEIR MISSION

Starting and scaling a startup is a wild ride, with every founder facing their own unique challenges. The good news is, you don't have to go it alone. Founded's community leads are your dedicated partners, offering personalised support exactly when you need it most. They provide the resources, expertise, and connections tailored to your specific needs, creating pathways to the opportunities that will drive your business forward.

If it matters to you, it matters to us.



Tjarda

"Helping founders overcome their biggest hurdles, especially when they feel stuck."

tjarda@founded.in
+31 6 13 96 36 77



Jochem

"Providing the support, resources, and connections to help you grow as an entrepreneur."

jochem@founded.in
+31 6 41 68 70 63

/ Need some guidance?
Contact Tjarda or Jochem to schedule a meeting!

HOW CAN FOUNDED HELP YOU



1. Connect with investors who share your vision, increasing your chances of funding.
2. Access high-impact programmes, like incubators and accelerators, for rapid scaling.
3. Find funding opportunities, including grants and subsidies.
4. Craft a compelling pitch deck that grabs investor attention.
5. Gain media visibility to attract investors, customers, and partners.
6. Connections with startup growth mentors, business development experts, and other experienced founders for invaluable guidance and partnerships.
7. Recruit top talent to build a strong, skilled team.
8. Discover international opportunities through trade missions and conferences.
9. Advise on office space and locations for strategic advantages and networking.

STARTUPFRAMEWORK BY GRITD:

YOUR ROAD TO CONSISTENT GROWTH

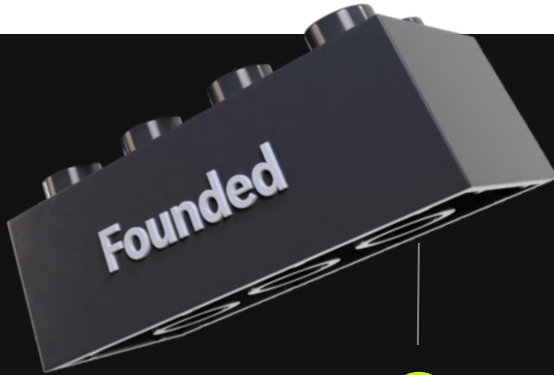
The **StartupFramework developed by Gritd** is a data-driven growth model specifically developed to help startups make consistent progress and reduce growth risks. The framework is based on extensive research and insights from over **3,000 validated startups**, representing nearly one-third of all startups in the Netherlands. Gritd developed the StartupFramework to provide **startups, venture developers, investors, and other startup supporters** with a shared language and structure for making sharp, evidence-based decisions during the early stages of entrepreneurship.

Why use the StartupFramework?

The StartupFramework helps you to:

- Set clear goals and align your team accordingly;
- Measure progress through concrete validation steps;
- Receive targeted feedback tailored to your startup's current lifestage;
- Increase your chances of investment by building up staged evidence.

The StartupFramework builds systematically from idea to scalable organization and prevents you from wasting time and money on steps for which no real proof has yet been established.



THE FIRST SIX MILESTONES:

YOUR PATH FROM IDEA TO BUSINESS MODEL FIT

The StartupFramework distinguishes four lifestages and twelve corresponding milestones. Below are the first six (the core of Lifestage 1 and 2) in which you prove whether your idea truly has traction in the market.

Milestone 1 - Validate the Earlyvangelist

- **Goal:** Identify your first customer who truly feels the problem, is actively seeking a solution, and is willing to invest time, money, or data.
- **Focus:** Behavior over intention. These customers are not hypothetical — they act because the problem is real and urgent.
- **Founder tip:** Conduct interviews in batches of 10 people with the same DMU role (e.g., end-users) and aim for 80% problem recognition within the group.

Checkpoint: ✓

Have you identified at least 10 potential customers who urgently experience your problem? Have you conducted deep-dive interviews with at least 5 of them?





Problem- solution fit

Milestone 2 - Problem-solution fit

- **Goal:** Validate whether your solution (or its concept) directly addresses the confirmed problem of your earlyvangelists.
- **Focus:** The solution doesn't have to be perfect yet — it must be credible and relevant.
- **Founder tip:** Test your concept with MVPs such as mockups, demo videos, or one-pagers and seek real commitment (e.g., pre-sales, LOIs, or pilot agreements).

Checkpoint:

Have at least 50% of your target customers agreed your solution addresses their problem? If not, what's the biggest objection you're hearing?

Milestone 4 - Product-market fit (PMF)

- **Goal:** Build a product that customers continue to use and recommend to others.
- **Focus:** Retention, usage, and referrals are key indicators of success.
- **Founder tip:** Use customer interviews, usage data, and NPS surveys to assess whether your product is perceived as indispensable.
- **Self-assessment:** Can you confidently explain your unique value proposition in one clear sentence? Is your customer retention rate steadily increasing month-over-month?

Checkpoint: ✓

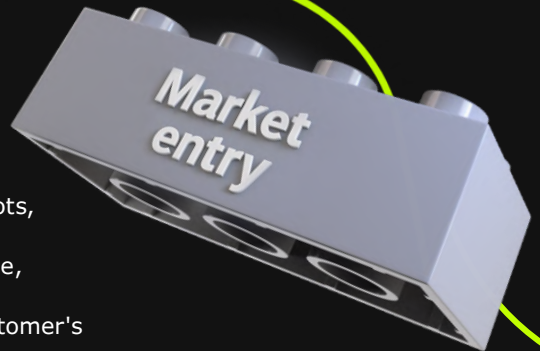
Do you achieve at least 60% customer retention and do at least 40% of your customers see your product as a must-have (e.g., via referrals or usage data)? If not, what is the main bottleneck holding you back in validating your product-market fit?

Milestone 3 - Market entry

- **Goal:** Secure your first forms of customer commitment: paid pilots, signed LOIs, or contracts.
- **Focus:** Not just enthusiasm — seek actual customer actions (time, budget, internal buy-in).
- **Founder tip:** Discuss the decision-making process within the customer's organisation. Map out the full DMU (Decision-Making Unit).

Checkpoint: ✓

Have at least 25% of your target customers indicated a willingness to pay for your solution? If not, what is the biggest barrier you hear regarding willingness to pay?



Milestone 5 - Repeatable sales process

- **Goal:** Develop a predictable method for acquiring new customers without relying solely on the founder.
- **Focus:** Prioritise process over chance — know what works, for whom, and why.
- **Founder tip:** Test whether at least 70% of your sales can be predicted through a repeatable, standardised sales process.

Checkpoint: ✓

Can you predict and repeat at least 70% of your sales with a standardized sales process? If not, what is the biggest inconsistency you encounter in your sales approach?



Milestone 6 - Business model fit (BMF)

- **Goal:** Establish a scalable, consistent business model with predictable revenue.
- **Focus:** Balance between supply and demand, and clarity in operational execution.
- **Founder tip:** Analyse your growth potential using metrics like Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Lifetime Value (LTV), and operational consistency.

Checkpoint: ✓

Does your business model score at least a 7/10 on consistency in operational processes and predictable revenue growth (based on data analysis)? If not, where do you see the biggest mismatch between supply and demand or scalability in your model?

WHAT ABOUT **YOUR** DREAM MILESTONE?

Being a founder means pushing the boundaries of what's possible. Where others see challenges, you see opportunities. You turn dreams into successes.

But what is your biggest dream? Your boldest ambition?

Challenge us with your most daring question to reach that milestone. We're excited to help you turn it into reality.

These founders dared to speak their dreams out loud:



"Revolutionizing industrial sustainability through external pipeline contamination detection."

Fabian Compagner | ToPerform

"I dream of achieving the milestone that moves us toward a future where all businesses are responsible."

Marjella Lecourt-Alma | Datamaran



"My dream is to make water recycling as common in homes and buildings as solar panels on rooftops."

Sabine Stuiver | Hydraloop

"Creating global impact by making study textbooks accessible."

Jeff van der Laan | BUKU



THE NEXT SIX MILESTONES: TOWARDS MARKET LEADERSHIP

Once you've validated your early traction and built a repeatable, scalable business model, it's time to accelerate growth. Milestones 7 through 12 help you structure the transition from early success to market dominance. These milestones fall under Lifestage 3 (Scaling) and Lifestage 4 (Leadership).

Milestone 7 - Execution-driven team

- **Goal:** Build a team that can execute without relying solely on the founder(s).
- **Focus:** Delegate operations, sales, and development to a capable team with clear roles and responsibilities.
- **Founder tip:** Hire specialists to replace generalists and introduce OKRs or KPIs to align team efforts with growth targets

Checkpoint:

Does at least 80% of your team have the skills and motivation to support rapid growth and drive innovation? If not, what is the biggest obstacle in attracting or retaining top talent to your corporate culture?



Milestone 8 - Strategic positioning

- **Goal:** Position your startup clearly within the market to support long-term differentiation and focus.
- **Focus:** Define your market category, ideal customer, and unique positioning compared to competitors.
- **Founder tip:** Use customer insights and competitor analysis to sharpen your story. Align marketing, sales, and product with that positioning.

Checkpoint:

Is at least 30% of your revenue diversified across multiple supply lines or partnerships to reduce dependencies? If not, what is the biggest constraint in strengthening your financial base or market position?



Milestone 9 - Create Market Demand

- **Goal:** Generate scalable demand through marketing and lead generation.
- **Focus:** Move to scalable inbound and outbound activities.
- **Founder tip:** Invest in performance marketing, partnerships, and content that supports your positioning.

Checkpoint:

Do you generate at least 20% of your new demand from international markets or capacity expansion of your team? If not, what is the biggest challenge in retaining customers or scaling your team for expansion?

Milestone 10 - Mission-driven departments

- **Goal:** Build departments that act autonomously and are aligned with your mission and strategy.
- **Focus:** Formalise leadership, define metrics per department, and install a company-wide rhythm.
- **Founder tip:** Replace ad-hoc coordination with structured planning, reviews, and retrospectives.

Checkpoint: ✓

Are you achieving consistent growth of more than 20% per year in revenue or headcount over at least 2 of the past 3 years?

If not, what is the biggest bottleneck preventing sustainable growth of your departments?



Milestone 11 - Transform to mass market

- **Goal:** Move beyond early adopters and scale to mainstream customer segments.
- **Focus:** Adapt product, processes, and messaging to meet expectations of the broader market.
- **Founder tip:** Focus on reliability, social proof, and risk reduction. Mainstream customers need certainty.

Checkpoint: ✓

Have you signed agreements with at least one major company that supports your expansion with their infrastructure or customer base?

If not, what is the biggest hurdle in leveraging strategic partnerships for mass market access?



Scaling isn't the goal — it's the outcome of consistent validation

These final six milestones help you grow with structure. Scaling is not just about speed, it's about timing and readiness.

The StartupFramework ensures you invest time, people, and capital in the right areas, at the right moment. Market leadership is earned. Step by step. With proof, not assumptions.

Milestone 12 - Achieve market leadership

- **Goal:** Become the category-defining leader in your market.
- **Focus:** Maintain momentum while reinforcing your brand, culture, and long-term strategic advantage.
- **Founder tip:** Think beyond product: build an ecosystem, attract top-tier talent, and lead industry conversations.

Checkpoint:

Do you have a clear strategy (IPO, acquisition, or staying private) with a realistic valuation that supports market leadership?

If not, what is the biggest uncertainty or challenge in preparing for a transition or maintaining your position?

FUNDING FOR STARTUPS

After establishing a strong foundation, it's time to scale with intent, prioritising execution, positioning, and market leadership. While the Dutch startup ecosystem is rich in innovation, a deep understanding of the funding landscape is essential for successful scaling. Funding is a crucial step in the growth of a startup, helping to get your company off the ground, scale operations, and gain a competitive edge. Even though we don't recommend start-ups to actively pursue funding before they have finished milestone 1.1 and 1.2, it is important to understand key funding options, investor expectations, and common pitfalls to avoid. Let's guide you through these aspects to help navigate your funding journey effectively.

Types of Funding

There are several ways to secure financing, each with its own advantages and challenges. There are no best ways to secure your funding, you'll have to find out which strategy fits your company best.

B Bootstrapping

Financing your startup using personal savings or revenue from early sales allows you to maintain full control. However, limited resources can slow down growth. Most successful startups have bootstrapped during the first two milestones of the GRITD model.



Friends, Family & Fools

Raising funds from personal networks can offer flexible terms and minimal bureaucracy. However, it may strain relationships if things go wrong. This category is usually only available for the very first stage of funding, when the funding requirement is relatively low.

BUT WAIT!
There is more!



Types of Funding



Grants & Government Support

Many governments and institutions provide grants and low-interest loans. Examples include innovation credits, EU grants, and local business funds. Especially in the North of the Netherlands many government grants are available. The obvious advantage is that you don't dilute your ownership, but the process can be very demanding and create an administrative burden.



Bank Loans & Microloans

Banks and microfinance institutions offer loans that do not require giving up equity. The downside is the repayment obligation, often with interest. As banks are usually risk-averse about start-ups, the options are limited. The most used bank loan is the Rabobank Innovation Loan (RIL).



Angel Investors

Private investors finance early-stage startups in exchange for equity. They are ideal for startups with innovative ideas and initial traction.



Venture Capital (VC)

Venture capital firms invest large sums in high-growth startups, expecting scalability, a strong team, and a clear exit strategy. Having a clear exit strategy often involves an exit for the founders.



Crowdfunding

Funding can come from a large group of people through platforms like Kickstarter, Seedrs, or Indiegogo. Models include reward-based, equity-based, and debt-based crowdfunding.



Corporate Investors & Strategic Partnerships

Large companies invest in startups that provide strategic advantages, offering not only funding but also networking and expertise. Often this strategy leads to an exit.

What investors look for

- A strong founding team with relevant experience and skills.
- A scalable business model with long-term growth potential.
- Traction and revenue, proving demand and business viability.
- A clear go-to-market strategy outlining customer acquisition.
- A well-defined exit strategy, ensuring investor returns.



Preparing a Funding Pitch

A compelling pitch is essential to attract investors. Your pitch deck should have a maximum of 12 slides and must cover at least:

- Problem – What issue are you solving?
- Solution – How does your product or service work?
- Market Potential – How big is the opportunity?
- Business Model – How do you generate revenue?
- Team – Why is your team the right fit?
- Competitive Analysis – How do you stand out?
- Traction – Early customers, growth, and revenue metrics.
- Financial Projections – Expected revenue and costs.
- Investment Needs – How much do you need and how will you use it?

Common Funding Mistakes

/ Lack of a clear financial plan makes investors hesitant.

/ Giving away too much equity in early stages can lead to excessive dilution.

/ Seeking funding too early or too late can hurt your startup.

/ An unclear legal structure or cap table can complicate future investment rounds.



Next Funding Step

Have you built a strong pitch deck clearly outlining your business model, growth potential, and why investors should fund your startup?

YES



You're ready to start investor outreach. Contact your community lead for advice on the best grant schemes and investors for your phase.

NO



Schedule a pitch review session with your community lead.

Explore what's next on Founded.in

Game-changing programs:

Do you have a brilliant startup idea and the drive to make it happen? Or are you already working on your startup and looking for help with validation or investments? Check out the programs that provide access to mentors, valuable networks, and investors.

Exciting events:

Meet fellow entrepreneurs, grow your network, and level up your startup at interesting events.

Unfiltered Founder stories:

Learn from fellow founders who've been there. These stories offer real-world examples of how Dutch startups have overcome challenges and achieved key milestones.



Your Startup. Your Rules. Your Future.

Ready to take your startup to the next level? We're here to help you take that crucial next step, conquer the market and secure the funding you deserve.

But that's just the beginning, there's a whole world of support waiting for you.



This isn't the whole map, but it might just help you sketch yours.

Because no two startup journeys are the same, and there's no single way to get where you're going. Sometimes, a bit of clarity, connection, or timing makes all the difference.

Explore what's possible, meet your support network, and take that next step - on your terms.

Scan the QR or visit [Founded.in](https://www.founded.in)

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