# **Funding Your Startup**

THE STAGES EVERY FOUNDER MUST MASTER



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# **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Starting a business is exciting: the spark of an idea, the thrill of building something new, and the vision of making an impact. But before long, the big question arrives: how are you going to pay for it?

For many founders, funding is the single biggest hurdle. It's also one of the most misunderstood. Too often, entrepreneurs assume that the only path to raising millions is through venture capital. The truth? Very few businesses start with big VC cheques. Most begin with scrappy founders making the most of personal savings, calling in favours, and proving their concept step by step before scaling to larger investors.

Funding isn't a one-off event. It's a journey with a series of stages, where the type of money you raise, and the expectations tied to it evolve. What works in year one, such as bootstrapping, may not make sense in year three, when investors expect solid traction, a well-defined business model, and evidence of growth.

#### Why This eBook

There's no shortage of startup advice online. Still, much of it is either too technical, too vague, or written for companies already well into their growth journey. What's often missing is a clear, step-by-step guide that shows founders how funding works in the real world.

At MultipleAI, we've met and helped countless founders with brilliant ideas, but many of them hit the same roadblock: they weren't sure how to fund their project. Some assumed venture capital was the only option, others didn't know where to start, and many underestimated the range of funding paths available at different stages of growth.

#### Who This eBook Is For

This eBook is written for:

- First-time founders who need to understand their funding options.
- Small business owners who want to scale but aren't sure where to turn for capital.
- Startup teams are preparing to approach investors for the first time.
- Entrepreneurs in transition those moving from bootstrapping to more formal sources of funding.

If you're experienced in raising capital, you may already be familiar with some of the information inside. But even seasoned founders will find value in the frameworks, reminders, and checklists designed to keep you on track.

Before we dive in, it's helpful to see the funding journey as more than just a search for cash. Startups typically progress through nine funding stages, beginning with bootstrapping and moving on to friends and family, grants, angel investors, venture capital, crowdfunding, banks, strategic investors, and ultimately, exit pathways.

However, funding isn't only about raising money; it's also about what comes with it: giving up equity, preparing the proper documents, and building relationships that shape the future of your business. In the chapters ahead, we'll explore both the funding stages and the bigger picture beyond money so you can plan your journey with clarity and confidence.

# **CHAPTER 2: THE FUNDING STAGES**

Funding a startup isn't a one-time event. It's a journey made up of stages. Each stage reflects where you are in your company's life cycle, the type of resources you need, and who is most likely to support you at that point.

This chapter will guide you through all nine stages of startup funding, highlighting when each stage is appropriate, the advantages and risks associated with it, and how to prepare yourself for each stage. Think of it as a roadmap: you may not follow every stage in order, but understanding the whole journey helps you make smarter decisions.

# Stage 1: Bootstrapping

Every founder's journey begins with themselves. Before you can convince anyone else to invest in your idea, you often need to invest in a White Paper or a Business Plan, which provides a clear understanding of your idea. This stage is called bootstrapping. It means using your own savings, income, or personal assets to launch your startup. It's a stage where you may have to make sacrifices, cut back on spending, or juggle part-time work. But bootstrapping teaches you invaluable lessons such as how to be smart, lean, and resourceful.

#### **Why Bootstrapping Works**

- **Complete control:** You don't have to answer to investors or give up equity. Every decision is yours.
- **Financial discipline:** With limited resources, you learn to spend wisely and prioritise what truly matters.
- Proof of concept: You can test your idea and show that it works before risking anyone else's money.

This stage gives you credibility later. When investors see that you've put your own skin in the game and achieved results without outside funding, they're more likely to trust you.

#### **Tips for Smarter Bootstrapping**

- **Start small:** Instead of building the "perfect" version of your product, create a Proof of Concept or Minimum Viable Product (MVP). These are the simplest versions that demonstrate your idea.
- **Keep overheads low:** Don't rush into renting offices or hiring full-time staff. Work from home, share a co-working space, or use contractors and free-lancers until revenue is steady.
- **Leverage your own skills:** Utilise your existing strengths to reduce costs. For example, design your own pitch deck, handle early marketing, or set up your website with free or low-cost tools.
- **Generate early revenue:** Don't wait for perfection before launching your product. Even small, early sales show demand and build momentum. That little bit of cash flow also makes you more credible.

Think of Bootstrapping as Planting the Seed. Initially, the seed appears small, fragile, and perhaps even insignificant. But it's alive, and if you nurture it, it grows into something bigger. Bootstrapping may not give you overnight success, but it lays the foundation for growth, discipline, and resilience.

## Stage 2: Friends, Family & Fools

Once you've exhausted your own resources, the next step is often to turn to your inner circle: friends, family, and, as the saying goes, "fools"- people who believe in you even when your business is unproven. While the term may sound light-hearted, this stage is indeed serious. Many world-changing companies first raised money from supportive families or close friends. These people back *you* more than your business plan. While that trust is a decisive advantage, it also makes this stage delicate to manage.

#### The Benefits of Turning to Your Inner Circle

- Trust comes first: Friends and family believe in you as a person, not just your numbers. They're more likely to invest early when outsiders wouldn't.
- **Fast and flexible:** You can often raise money quickly without layers of paperwork or due diligence.
- **Early champions:** Supporters from your circle often become your loudest advocates, cheering you on and spreading the word.

#### The Risks You Need to Manage

- **Blurring the lines:** Is the money a loan, a gift, or equity? If expectations aren't clear, misunderstandings can sour relationships.
- **Emotional stakes:** If the business fails, you don't just lose money you risk damaging friendships or family ties.
- **Awkward dynamics:** A failed investment may alter the way people perceive you at family gatherings or social events.

#### How to Do It Right

- **Be transparent:** Don't just sell the upside. Share the risks openly. Ensure they understand that this money could be lost.
- **Put it in writing:** Even a simple agreement (loan terms, equity split, or repayment schedule) protects both sides and avoids confusion.
- **Encourage caution:** Urge them to only invest what they can afford to lose. That protects relationships if things don't go to plan.
- **Stay professional:** Treat them like real investors. Keep them updated and respect their involvement.

#### **Why Boundaries Matter**

The emotional side of this stage can't be underestimated. Unlike banks or angel investors, these individuals are personally invested in your success and failure. Setting boundaries through clear communication, written agreements, and professionalism is the best way to protect both your business and your relationships.

# Stage 3: Grants & Government Programs

After you've exhausted personal funds and tapped your inner circle, the next stage many founders overlook is government grants and programs. Unlike loans or equity investments, grants are often non-dilutive, which means you don't give up ownership or repay the money.

#### **Why Grants Matter**

- No equity dilution: You keep full ownership of your business.
- Added credibility: Winning a grant proves to future investors that your startup has merit.
- Additional benefits: Many grants include mentoring, networking, or training programs.

For some startups, a single grant has been the springboard to larger funding rounds by proving they're worth backing.

#### Where to Look for Grants and Programs

- **Government websites:** Start with your local or national small business agency. They often maintain updated lists.
- **Industry-specific programs:** Certain sectors (tech, sustainability, education, healthcare) offer tailored grants.
- **Regional initiatives:** Councils or development boards may support businesses that boost local economies.
- Universities and research bodies: If your idea has an innovation or R&D component, these can be rich sources of funding.

#### **Tips for Success**

- Follow the rules: Many applications fail not because the idea is bad, but because instructions weren't followed. Pay close attention to the criteria and deadlines.
- **Show the impact:** Grant providers want more than your success they want to see how your startup benefits society, creates jobs, or drives industry change.
- **Start small:** Don't ignore smaller grants. Even \$5,000–\$10,000 can cover critical costs, such as prototyping, marketing, or software development.
- **Be persistent:** It's common to be rejected the first time. Keep applying, refine your applications, and try again.

Securing a grant isn't just about the money. It's a vote of confidence. When a government body or institution backs you, it indicates to future investors that your idea has been vetted and endorsed. That credibility can make fundraising at later stages significantly easier.

### Stage 4: Angel Investors

If grants are like winning a prize, angel investors are like finding a mentor with both capital and wisdom. Angels are typically wealthy individuals who invest their own money in early-stage startups. Unlike banks, they're willing to take risks, and unlike VCs, they often get involved much earlier. Also, angels don't just bring money. Many are former entrepreneurs themselves, so they can also open doors, provide advice, and connect you with their networks.

#### **Why Angel Investors Invest**

- **Belief in you:** Angels are often backing *the founder* as much as the idea. They want to see passion, grit, and a clear vision.
- Potential for high returns: Startups are inherently risky, but a single big win can compensate for many losses.
- **Giving back:** Many angels enjoy helping new entrepreneurs, especially in industries with which they are familiar.

#### **How to Attract Angels**

- **Show traction:** Even small wins matter, such as a handful of customers, a growing sign-up list, or a successful pilot, which can demonstrate that your idea is viable.
- **Keep it clear and concise:** Angels don't need a 200-page plan. A polished pitch deck that explains the problem, your solution, the market, and how you'll make money is enough.
- **Highlight your team:** Investors know ideas change, but the right team can adapt. Demonstrate that you have the skills and resilience to make it work.

Remember, angels are people too. They're moved by stories as much as spreadsheets. Share the reason you're building this and let your passion show. It often makes the difference between a polite "no" and a committed "yes."

# Stage 5: Venture Capital

If angels help you take off, venture capital (VC) is the rocket fuel that can propel you into orbit. Venture capital firms invest other people's money (from pension funds, institutions, and wealthy individuals), so they're under pressure to find companies that can deliver huge returns quickly. This makes them an attractive but demanding partner.

#### The Appeal of Venture Capital

- Large sums of money: Millions, not thousands, to accelerate growth.
- Network and credibility: VCs bring access to talent, customers, and other investors.
- Prestige: A VC-backed company often gains instant credibility in the market.

#### The Trade-Offs

- **Loss of control:** You'll give away a significant chunk of equity, and possibly board seats.
- **Pressure to scale fast:** VCs push for rapid growth, even if it strains your business.
- **High expectations:** If you miss growth targets, support can vanish quickly.

#### **How to Pitch VCs**

- **Think big:** They're not looking for small, profitable businesses. They want billion-dollar potential.
- **Bring solid data:** Scalable business models, strong margins, and realistic projections are essential.
- **Prepare for scrutiny:** VCs will probe your weaknesses. Expect tough questions about competition, risks, and scalability.

VC funding can be transformative, but it's not for every founder. If your vision is steady growth and independence, VCs may not be the right path. If you're aiming for rapid expansion and global reach, VC money can be the jet fuel you need.

# Stage 6: Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding flips traditional fundraising on its head. Instead of convincing one prominent investor, you convince hundreds of everyday people to support your idea. It's not just about raising money. Done right, crowdfunding builds a loyal community of early customers who feel invested in your success.

#### Two Main Types of Crowdfunding

- Reward-based crowdfunding (Kickstarter, Indiegogo): Investors pre-purchase your product or service, providing you with upfront capital to develop it.
- **Equity crowdfunding:** Backers buy small ownership stakes, becoming mini-investors in your business.

#### **Why Crowdfunding Works**

- **Funding + validation:** You don't just raise money; you prove people want your product.
- **Community building:** Your backers often become your biggest advocates and first customers.
- Accessibility: You don't need insider connections to launch a campaign.

#### **Keys to Success**

 Tell a strong story: People don't just back products, they back people and missions.

- **Show, don't just tell:** Videos, demos, and visuals dramatically increase support.
- **Promote actively:** Don't expect strangers to stumble across your campaign. Drive traffic with social media, email lists, and PR.

In summary, crowdfunding isn't just about capital. It's about momentum. When people invest in your story, they become more than customers. They become part of your journey.

# Stage 7: Bank & Institutional Funding

Banks may not sound as exciting as angels or VCs, but they've been financing businesses for centuries. The key difference is this: banks don't want equity, they want repayment. They lend you money, charge interest, and expect you to pay them back on schedule. For startups, this path is not always easy. Banks are conservative by nature, and they prefer proven businesses with steady revenue.

#### When Bank Loans Make Sense

- You have a reliable cash flow and can handle regular repayments.
- You need working capital to smooth seasonal ups and downs.
- You're financing something predictable, such as inventory, equipment, or expansion.

#### The Advantages

- You keep ownership: Loans don't dilute your equity. The bank doesn't get a say in how you run your company.
- Predictable repayments: You know exactly what you'll owe each month.
- Cheaper in the long run: Debt often costs less than giving away equity if your company grows quickly.

#### The Disadvantages

- Strict requirements: Banks want collateral, financial records, and strong credit history.
- Fixed repayments: You must pay whether sales are booming or struggling.
- **Personal guarantees:** Early-stage founders may need to back the loan with their own assets.

Here is a tip. Use loans only for stability and expansion, not for survival. If your business model isn't proven yet, taking on debt can sink you faster than it can save you.

# Stage 8: Strategic Partnerships & Corporate Investors

Sometimes the best investor isn't a VC, but a larger company that sees potential in your startup. These strategic investors back you because of synergy: your product might strengthen their offering, open new markets, or give them a competitive edge. This type of funding can be a game-changer, providing not only capital but also access to customers, distribution, and expertise that might otherwise take years to develop.

#### **Why Strategic Partnerships Are Powerful**

- More than money: You might get office space, technical support, or shared resources.
- Market access: Tap into your partner's existing customer base or distribution networks.
- Long-term alignment: If your solution complements theirs, both sides benefit.

#### What to Watch Out For

- **Loss of independence:** A corporate partner may pressure you to align with their goals, rather than yours.
- Exclusivity traps: Some deals prevent you from working with competitors.
- Cultural mismatch: Startups move fast; corporations move slowly.

The best approach is to treat strategic investors as true partners. Ensure your visions align before signing any documents. Otherwise, the "help" could hold you back.

## Stage 9: Exit Pathways

#### IPOs, Acquisitions, or Reinvestment

Every investor, from angels to VCs, has one question at the back of their mind: "How will I eventually get my money back?" That's why it's essential to consider your exit pathway early, even if it seems distant. An exit is not just about cashing out; it's about giving your backers a return on their investment and defining the long-term future of your business.

#### **Common Exit Routes**

- Acquisition: A larger company buys your startup. This is the most common outcome and can provide both founders and investors with a healthy return on investment.
- **IPO (Initial Public Offering):** Listing your company on the stock market. This is rare but can deliver massive rewards and prestige.
- **Reinvestment or Buyback:** Founders may buy back shares from early investors to regain control, or profits may be reinvested into scaling further.

#### **Why Exit Strategies Matter**

- Investor confidence: A clear exit plan makes you more attractive to investors.
- **Realistic planning:** Not every business is destined for an IPO. Acquisitions or reinvestment are equally valid outcomes.
- **Direction:** Knowing the likely exit shapes the way you grow and the investors you attract.

Your exit pathway isn't just the end of the journey. It's part of the promise you're making to investors. A clear, realistic plan shows you've thought about the big picture and makes your business more fundable.

#### Conclusion

No two startups follow the exact same funding path. Some skip certain stages altogether, while others loop back or blend multiple options at once. What matters most is not simply ticking boxes but instead choosing the funding path that aligns with your business model, growth goals, and personal vision.

Understanding the nine stages helps to see where you are today and where you should head next. With this roadmap, you can navigate the funding journey with confidence and avoid the costly mistakes of chasing the wrong money.

# CHAPTER 3: HOW MUCH EQUITY SHOULD YOU GIVE AWAY?

One of the most challenging questions every founder faces is: "How much equity should I give away?" The answer depends on your stage, your valuation, and the source of your funding. Equity isn't just a number; it represents ownership, control, and the long-term value of your company. Giving away too much too early can come back to haunt you, but holding on too tightly can also block the growth you need.

#### 1. What Equity Means

Equity equals ownership. Every share you give away is a slice of your company's future. But owning 100% of a small pie may not be as valuable as owning a smaller share of a much bigger one. Sometimes, less really is more. For example:

- 100% of a \$100,000 company = \$100,000.
- 70% of a \$5 million company = \$3.5 million.

#### 2. Typical Ranges at Different Stages

Although every deal is unique, here are some ballpark figures:

- Angel investors: 5–20% for early-stage capital.
- Seed/early VC rounds: 10–25%, depending on valuation and traction.
- Later VC rounds: 15–30%, often less dilutive as your valuation grows.
- Strategic/corporate investors: Highly variable; sometimes a small slice in exchange for market access or partnerships.

#### 3. Using SAFEs and Convertible Notes in the Early Stages

At the very beginning, it's often impossible to agree on a fair valuation. You may not have an MVP yet, or enough traction to justify a number. That's why many founders use SAFEs (Simple Agreements for Future Equity) or convertible notes.

- **SAFE Note:** Investors give you money now in exchange for equity later, when you raise your first priced funding round. Their investment typically converts at a discount or a valuation cap as compensation for taking the early risk.
- Convertible Note: Like a SAFE Note but structured as debt that accrues interest until it converts to equity.

#### Why this helps founders:

- Avoids setting a premature valuation.
- Simple, fast, and cheaper than formal equity rounds.
- Founder-friendly: lets you raise money without giving away significant ownership stakes too soon.

#### What to watch out for:

- Keep track of how many SAFE Notes you issue, as they all ultimately convert into equity.
- Understand the terms (discounts, valuation caps) as they determine your future dilution.

 SAFEs work best with angels or early-stage funds; some investors still prefer traditional equity or loans.

**Takeaway:** If you're too early to justify a valuation, a SAFE can be the smartest bridge between bootstrapping and raising your first priced round.

#### 4. Control Matters as Much as Percentages

Equity isn't just math. It can also come with voting rights, board seats, or veto power. Giving away 10% with board influence can sometimes mean giving away much more. Always understand the rights attached to the shares, not just the percentage.

#### 5. Protect Your Future Self

It's easy to give away too much equity in the excitement of getting your first investment. The risk is that by the time you reach Series B or C, you've been diluted so much that you no longer control your own company.

**Rule of thumb:** Try to keep at least 50% combined ownership between the founding team by the time you reach Series A.

#### 6. Valuation Sets the Equation

Equity is always tied to valuation. The formula is simple:

Equity % = (Investment ÷ Valuation) × 100

#### Example:

- A \$200,000 investment at a \$2 million valuation = 10% equity.
- The same \$200,000 at a \$1 million valuation = 20% equity.

The higher your valuation, the less equity you give up for the same investment.

#### 7. Ask the Bigger Question

Instead of focusing only on "How much equity should I give away?", ask:

- What will this investor bring beyond money?
- Will this equity help me grow faster than I could on my own?

Equity is a tool, not just a cost. Used wisely, it can accelerate your business and open doors you couldn't access otherwise.

# **CHAPTER 4: THE STARTUP FUNDING TOOLKIT:**

#### What Documents You Need (and When)

Money follows confidence, and confidence comes from preparation. Investors want to see that you've thought deeply about your business, and the documents you prepare are proof of that. They don't just explain your idea, they show that you're serious, credible, and ready to handle funding.

#### The Importance of a White Paper:

One of the most powerful early-stage tools is a White Paper (Or Business Plan). A White Paper clarifies your idea in a structured way: it explains the problem you're solving, the solution you're offering, and why it matters in the market. Writing one forces founders to think clearly about their business model, target audience, and value proposition.

For many startups, the White Paper is the first time the idea stops being "just in my head" and becomes a concrete plan others can understand. It not only helps attract early believers, such as friends, family, or grant committees, but also provides a foundation to build future documents, including pitch decks, business plans, and investor updates.

Here's a stage-by-stage roadmap of the documents you'll need as your funding journey progresses:

#### Stage 1-2: Bootstrapping & Friends/Family

At this stage, your supporters are investing in *you* more than your numbers. Keep documents simple, but use them to show clarity of thought.

- White Paper: A structured summary of your idea, the problem, and your proposed solution. Essential for clarifying your vision and sharing it with others.
- One-Pager: A shorter, easy-to-digest version of your White Paper.
- Simple Business Plan: 2–3 pages covering market, model, and milestones.
- Elevator Pitch: A 60-second story you can share in any conversation.

These documents aren't about impressing professional investors; they're about proving you've thought things carefully and can explain your vision clearly.

#### **Stage 3: Grants & Government Programs**

Here, detail matters. Governments love structure and accountability.

- Grant Application Forms: Follow instructions carefully.
- **Proof of Concept:** A prototype, pilot, or early results showing feasibility.
- Basic Financials: A budget outlining how funds will be used.

In this stage, paperwork is as necessary as the idea itself.

#### Stage 4-6: Angels, VCs & Crowdfunding

Now you're in the big leagues. Investors want clarity, proof, and a vision of scale.

- **Pitch Deck (10–15 slides):** Problem, solution, market, traction, business model, financials, team, and the ask.
- MVP (Minimum Viable Product): A working version that demonstrates potential.
- Customer Validation: Testimonials, pilot sales, or market research.

Angels invest in vision, VCs in scale, and crowdfunders in excitement, but all want to see something real.

#### Stage 7: Banks & Institutional Funding

Banks care about repayment, not hype.

- Detailed Business Plan: Clear revenue streams and repayment strategy.
- Cash Flow Forecasts: Proof you can cover repayments.
- Collateral Documentation: Assets backing the loan.

Banks don't gamble. They want assurance that you can repay them.

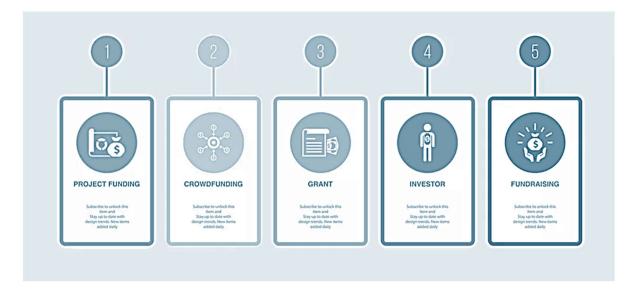
#### Stage 8-9: Strategic Investors & Exits

At this level, professionalism is non-negotiable. Expect deep due diligence.

- Advanced Financial Models: Multi-year forecasts with KPIs (CAC, LTV, churn, margins).
- Growth Metrics: Evidence of scalability and sustainability.
- Data Room: A secure folder with contracts, IP, HR records, and financial statements.

#### **Takeaway**

You don't need every document at once. Build your toolkit step by step. As your startup grows, so should the quality and depth of your materials.



# **CHAPTER 5. CHECKLIST**

Before you start knocking on investor doors, take a moment to assess your readiness. Use this checklist to see if you're prepared to raise money today or whether you need to do some groundwork first.

Cla	arity of Idea
	Can I explain the problem and my solution in one or two clear sentences?
	Do I have a simple story that makes the problem feel urgent and relatable?
Evi	dence of Traction
	Do I have paying customers, sign-ups, or pilot results?
	Can I show proof that the market wants what I'm offering?
Bu	siness Model
	Can I clearly explain how we make money?
	Do I understand my margins and growth potential?
Tea	am Strength
	Do we have the right mix of skills (technical, sales, operations)?
	Can I demonstrate why this team is the best suited to solve this problem?
Fin	ancial Basics
	Do I know my monthly burn rate and how long my runway is?
	Have I built realistic projections for the next 3–5 years?
Gr	owth Potential
	Can I articulate how the business can scale beyond early adopters?
	Do I understand the size of the market opportunity (TAM, SAM, SOM)?
Exi	it Strategy
	How do investors get their return (acquisition, IPO, reinvestment)?
	Can I explain this clearly and credibly?

If you tick most of these boxes, you're ready to pitch.

**If not:** Focus first on shoring up weak areas. It's far better to delay fundraising than to pitch unprepared and burn investor trust.

# **CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION**

Funding your startup isn't about finding a magic cheque that solves all your problems. It's about matching the correct type of capital to the right stage of your journey.

In the early days, bootstrapping and support from friends and family may be all you need to get your idea off the ground. As you prove your concept, grants can lend you credibility, and angel investors can provide both financial backing and valuable guidance.

If you're aiming for rapid growth, venture capital might make sense, while crowdfunding can double as both funding and marketing. Banks and institutional lenders become more viable once you have revenue stability, and strategic investors can provide the resources and networks that money alone can't buy.

But here's the critical part: each choice comes with trade-offs. Taking VC money might fuel rapid expansion, but you'll give up equity and control. Bank loans let you keep ownership, but they tie you to strict repayment schedules. Even grants require time, paperwork, and a focus on outcomes that align with the funder's goals.

That's why the most successful founders don't chase every dollar they can find. Instead, they carefully select a mix of funding sources that align with their stage, goals, and long-term vision for the company.

Think of funding as fuel. Too little, and you'll stall out. Too much too early, and you may burn through it without discipline. The right amount, at the right time, from the right source is what propels you forward while keeping you in control.

Remember, money is essential, but it's never the whole story. What matters most is building something valuable, solving real problems, and creating impact. If you do that well, the proper funding will follow.

If you enjoy this eBook and would like to learn more or need guidance on your startup, please get in touch with us to book a complimentary session at MultipleAl Solutions.

#### Let's build something great together.



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