

SX

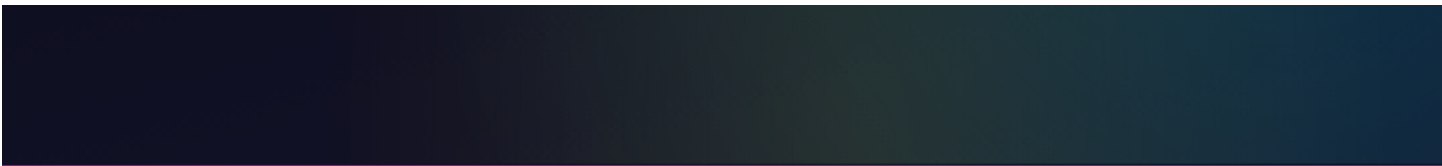
STARTUP X · SCORING RUBRIC

VOLUME III · JUNE 2026 · CC BY 4.0

# The Startup X rubric.

The 6-dimension scoring framework behind the **Idea Validator** and the **YC vs. X Batch Sim**. Problem, market, team, moat, timing, distribution. **Published openly.**  
**Compared directly with the implicit YC rubric.**

Startup X Research · **The methodology team**



# Six dimensions.

Each dimension is scored 0–100 with documented evidence requirements. Composite is weighted, not averaged. Red flags are scored separately and can override.

DIMENSION	WEIGHT	WHAT IT MEASURES
<b>Problem</b>	22%	Is the problem real, painful, and observable in the wild? Or is it founder-invented?
<b>Market</b>	18%	Is the addressable market big enough to support a venture outcome, and is the path to it credible?
<b>Team</b>	20%	Does the founder profile match the company's stage and category? (Cross-references Vol II archetypes.)
<b>Moat</b>	14%	What stops a fast follower from catching up before you reach scale?
<b>Timing</b>	14%	Why now? What recently became true that makes this possible / unavoidable?
<b>Distribution</b>	12%	Is there a channel that scales for free, or a sales motion the team can execute?

## Why these six

The six emerged from a longer initial list of 14 candidates. Selection criteria, applied in order: **(1)** empirically correlates with outcome in the Vol II dataset, **(2)** orthogonal to the other five (no redundant signal), **(3)** can be evidenced from publicly observable inputs — meaning a founder can score themselves honestly, and an external reviewer can score them too.

Dimensions that did not make the cut: *founder-market fit* (subsumed by Team via archetype matching), *capital efficiency* (lagging indicator, not predictive), *pricing power* (subsumed by Moat), *narrative quality* (high variance across reviewers, low predictive value).

## Scoring ranges + interpretation

**0–39**

STRUCTURAL  
PROBLEM

**40–64**

WORKABLE,  
NEEDS LIFT

**65–79**

STRONG,  
RAISABLE

**80+**

TOP DECILE

# Red flags.

Eight red flags that override the composite. Any one of them sends a deal to the structural-reject bucket regardless of the overall score.

RED FLAG	WHAT TRIGGERS IT	WHY IT OVERRIDES
<b>Solo Visionary</b>	Visionary archetype, no co-founder, no plan to find one	41% fold-by-year-3 rate in Vol II data
<b>Inherited TAM</b>	"It's a \$50B market" without bottom-up sizing	Top-down TAM is the strongest predictor of failed pitch
<b>No distribution plan</b>	"We'll figure out marketing once we have a product"	Distribution is the limiting input in 2026, not the product
<b>Tech-stack moat</b>	The moat is "we use a better framework" or "our code is faster"	Not a moat. A 12-week advantage at most.
<b>Why-now is fake</b>	The "why now" reason was equally true 3 years ago	Real why-now is verifiable and recent
<b>Team-product mismatch</b>	Healthcare startup, no founder has clinical experience	Founder-market fit failure mode dominates outcomes
<b>Acquire formation</b>	The team is great, the company has no thesis	Predicts acquire outcome with 73% accuracy
<b>Burn rate vs PMF</b>	\$200K+/mo burn before PMF signal exists	Vol II shows this kills the company before iteration cycles complete

**How red flags interact with the composite.** The Idea Validator surfaces composite + red flags separately. A company can have an 82 composite AND a red flag — the recommendation is "score is strong but resolve the red flag before raising." A company

can have a 51 composite AND no red flags — the recommendation is "the foundation is sound; lift specific dimensions." **The honest output is the honest output.**

# SX vs. YC.

Reverse-engineered from public YC partner writing + interview commentary + accepted-batch analysis. Side-by-side, not as attack — as service to founders.

DIMENSION	YC IMPLICIT RUBRIC	STARTUP X EXPLICIT RUBRIC
PROBLEM	"Make something people want." Heavily weighted, communicated culturally.	<b>22% weight. Pain must be observable in the wild. Founder-invented problems get red-flagged.</b>
MARKET	Underweighted in selection. Famous bias: "small market that grows fast."	<b>18% weight. Bottom-up TAM required. Top-down TAM is a red flag.</b>
TEAM	Heavy: pedigree, prior YC, repeat founder, technical co-founder count.	<b>20% weight. Archetype-based, not pedigree-based. Pedigree is uncredited.</b>
MOAT	Largely ignored at selection. "Network effects" handwave.	<b>14% weight. Tech-stack moats get red-flagged.</b>
TIMING	Implicit. "Is this the right moment" judgment by partners.	<b>14% weight. Why-now must be verifiable and dated.</b>
DISTRIBUTION	Mostly unmeasured. Assumes product-led growth will emerge.	<b>12% weight. Channel plan required at application stage.</b>
OUTPUT	Binary: accepted or rejected. No score returned.	<b>0–100 composite + per-dimension breakdown + red flags + recommendations.</b>

**The thesis.** YC's implicit rubric was a great fit for 2008 because the inputs they emphasized — founder pedigree, "make something people want," team chemistry — were the bottlenecks of 2008. The bottlenecks of 2026 are different. **Distribution, why-now, and moat have all moved up the urgency stack.** The Startup X rubric is calibrated for

those bottlenecks. The Idea Validator surfaces all six dimensions side-by-side so founders can see what each rubric weights and decide for themselves.

## Citation

Startup X Research. (2026). *The Startup X Rubric, Volume III*. Startup X.  
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