
Y Combinator Deep Research

Comprehensive Data & Intelligence (2025-2026)

*Compiled from YC partner statements, official YC resources,
and publicly shared application examples.*

February 2026

Y Combinator Deep Research: Comprehensive Data & Intelligence

Research Date: February 16, 2026 (Updated)

Coverage: Historical data through F25 batch (Fall 2025) + Spring 2026 RFS & application cycle

1. ACCEPTANCE RATES & STATISTICS

Overall Acceptance Rate

- * Current rate: ~1-1.5% (some recent batches have dipped below 1%)
- * W24 batch: 260 companies from 27,000+ applications = 0.96% acceptance rate
- * Applications per batch: 20,000-30,000+ (trending upward)
- * YC is 2x more selective than Harvard (1.5% vs ~3.4%)

Batch Sizes (Recent)

Batch	Companies	Notes
W24	260	One of the largest batches ever
S24	255	Last batch under 2x/year model
W25	~150-200	First batch under quarterly model
X25 (Spring)	143	New quarterly format
S25	169	88% AI-native
F25	150+	Heavy AI agent focus

Structural Change in 2025

- * YC moved from 2 batches/year to 4 batches/year (quarterly)
- * Each batch is roughly half the size of prior batches (~150 vs ~250)
- * Batches: Winter (W), Spring (X), Summer (S), Fall (F)

Spring 2026 Batch (Currently Open)

- * Application on-time deadline: February 9, 2026 at 8pm PT (late applications still accepted)
- * Decision notifications: By March 13, 2026 for on-time applicants
- * Batch dates: April to June 2026, San Francisco
- * Deal: \$500,000 via post-money SAFE for 7% equity + uncapped MFN SAFE

Early Decision Program (NEW - Launched Sept 2025)

- * Designed for students who want to start companies but don't want to drop out
- * Students apply while in school, get accepted and funded immediately, then defer participation until after graduation
- * Select "A batch after Spring 2026" in the application to indicate Early Decision

- * Example: A student applying fall 2025 could graduate spring 2026, then join YC's Summer 2026 batch
- * Success case: Spur's co-founders applied via Early Decision in fall 2023, graduated May 2024, joined Summer 2024 batch, raised \$4.5M since

Standard Deal Terms (Current)

- * Total investment: \$500,000
 - \$125,000 as post-money SAFE for 7% equity (fixed)
 - \$375,000 as uncapped MFN SAFE (converts at best terms of next round)
- * Investment is committed immediately upon acceptance (no milestone gates)
- * YC portfolio: 5,300+ companies, \$800B+ combined valuation, 100+ unicorns, 12+ public companies

2. COMMON TRAITS OF ACCEPTED COMPANIES

Stage at Entry

- * ~40% of each batch are just an idea (pre-product)
- * Majority are at the very earliest stage
- * However, a growing percentage are further along with real revenue

Team Composition (S24 Data)

- * 2 co-founders: 54% of companies (most common)
- * 3 founders: 23%
- * Solo founders: ~10% (declining proportion)
- * 4+ founders: ~13%

Technical Depth (S24 Data)

- * 72% of companies include a founder with a CS background
- * 55% include a founder with a Master's or PhD
- * 48% have at least one second-time founder
- * Largest proportion of founders have FAANG experience

Revenue Distribution at Application

- * Top 5-10%: \$150K-\$500K ARR
- * Middle 60%: \$3K-\$5K MRR, often in pilots
- * Lower tier: Zero revenue, struggling to sign customers
- * Average across entire cohort: ~\$66K revenue
- * 12+ companies per batch now exceed \$500K revenue (previously exceptional)

What YC Explicitly Looks For

1. Execution speed - shipping updates every couple of days
2. Technical founders who can build without outside help
3. Customer obsession - have talked to users, validated the problem
4. Co-founder strength - work well under pressure as a team

5. Clarity - ability to explain the idea in a single sentence
6. Commitment - founders who are "all in," not seeking validation

3. YC PARTNER QUOTES & PHILOSOPHY

Michael Seibel (Partner Emeritus)

NOTE: Seibel also transitioned to Partner Emeritus after 12+ years at YC. He continues office hours with the 1,000+ companies he worked with while exploring new directions.

- * On communication: "The biggest turn-off is when reviewers still don't know what your company does after reading your answer, usually caused by using jargon and buzzwords. Explain it like you would to your grandmother."
- * On filtering: "When YC reads an application, they ask themselves if they want to bet against this person, even if they would never want to build that company themselves."
- * On commitment: "We see founders who aren't 'all in' looking for YC validation as a bad sign. They prefer backing people who've 'jumped off the ledge.'"
- * 5 key elements: (1) 2-sentence description + specific example, (2) impressive team accomplishments (not titles), (3) traction with timeframes, (4) non-obvious insights, (5) lack of negatives (absence of red flags is itself a positive)
- * On the 90/10 solution: "Ask how to get 90% of what you want with only 10% of work." Hard for founders because most look for perfection, but "the faster you can get a product out there the faster you can iterate based on feedback."
- * On the 60-second rule: "You must earn each additional minute of investor attention. Lead with whatever is most impressive about your company, not what comes first in a traditional pitch deck template."
- * On clarity vs accuracy: "Being 80% accurate and 100% clear is better than the reverse. Simple language wins because industry jargon signals insecurity, not expertise."
- * On execution speed: What YC really wants to know is what you've accomplished in the time you've been working. "If your main business is a website still in beta after two years, that's not impressive -- but final drawings of a rocket core engine after 6 months could be significant."
- * On co-founders: "Startups are ridiculously stressful and having another person there to share the load is important." Teams need a technical founder who can build an MVP -- not relying on external contractors.
- * On product-market fit: "If you are not drowning in demand, you don't have product-market fit."

Dalton Caldwell (Partner Emeritus -- departed mid-2025)

NOTE: Dalton transitioned from Managing Director to Partner Emeritus in mid-2025 after 12+ years and 25 batches at YC. He co-founded Standard Capital, an AI-native Series A firm, alongside Bryan Berg and Paul Buchheit. He remains a limited resource to YC founders and alumni.

- * On application effort: "You don't need to spend dozens of hours on the application. You don't need to contact 30 alumni; you don't need to talk to me. A lot of the folks that get in ... just apply. They put some thought into it, they do a good job -- but they don't obsess over getting into YC."
- * On gatekeepers: "You just apply. You don't need permission, you don't need warm intros." Warns that "fake gatekeepers" claiming inside angles are not legitimate.
- * On idea selection: "Often, when someone gets into YC, they need to change their idea. We'll say, 'Wait, you're not doing the idea that's right under your nose, where you're the world's expert.' Usually, their answer is some version of 'We didn't think the idea would be fashionable enough.'"
- * On team evaluation: Looks first for "technical excellence on the team."
- * On tarpit ideas: Ideas that feel sexy and generate positive feedback but are dead ends. Consumer "discovery" apps are classic tarpits. "The magical place doesn't exist." Tarpit ideas attract founders because problems remain unsolved, buyers

say they'd love a solution, and no large company exists around the problem -- but they've been tried over and over again.

- * On writing quality: Looks for "something clear and well-written, without buzzwords, with conciseness, clarity, and bluntness."
- * On co-founders: Recommends having more than one co-founder -- "it's much harder to be a single founder."
- * On founder wellbeing: "Something I learned over a decade as a YC partner is when a founder is struggling, to first debug if they are taking care of themselves or otherwise under personal stress. If a founder can fix those things, their startup problems suddenly don't seem insurmountable anymore."

Garry Tan (President & CEO)

- * On what matters: "What matters most is what you've built and what you can build. If, in 10 minutes, you can't actually understand what's going on, it means the person on the other end doesn't really understand it either."
- * On founder character: Champions "ambitious misfits" and values earnestness over polish. "It's not the flashiest resume or the boldest pitch but something far rarer: earnestness." This determines "how startups can make or break."
- * On acting small: "When you're starting something new, the whole advantage is that you're a real human being. We are so starved for real, authentic connection that if you can talk to people and say 'Hey, I'm the CEO. What do you need?' That's the most powerful thing."
- * On retention: "A 10% difference in retention is actually the difference between a startup that's flatlining and one that's working. The compounding of this is really, really massive."
- * On AI impact (2025): "It's not just the number one or two companies -- the whole batch is growing 10% week on week. That's never happened before in early-stage venture."
- * On AI-written code (March 2025, CNBC): "For about a quarter of the current YC startups, 95% of the code was written by AI." Called it "vibe coding" -- letting models take the wheel and generate software.
- * On team size revolution: "What that means for founders is that you don't need a team of 50 or 100 engineers. You don't have to raise as much. The capital goes much longer." Companies reaching \$10M revenue with teams of less than 10 people.
- * On the current moment (Dec 2025): "This is by far the best time in the history of startups to be starting one." "This universe unleashes a truly epic decade for startups."
- * On application volume: YC receives 70,000-80,000 applications per year across all four batches. ~1% acceptance rate. Alumni behind 60% of the past decade's unicorns.
- * On AI transforming software: AI transformed software from a "nice to have" into an urgent necessity.

Jared Friedman (Managing Director, Software)

- * Co-founder of Scribd (YC W06, grew to top-100 website)
- * Shares frameworks for how to get and evaluate startup ideas
- * Emphasizes studying how billion-dollar YC companies came up with their ideas

Gustaf Alstromer (Group Partner)

- * Former Product Lead, Growth at Airbnb (4.5 years)
- * Has read 9,000+ applications and worked with 600+ startups
- * On failure: "The reason companies fail is because they don't talk to users, which means they don't find product-market fit, and if they don't find product-market fit, nothing else really matters."
- * On focus: "Don't get distracted chasing things that don't help move the needle towards PMF, like PR and events -- what you should do is build product and talk to users."

4. SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION ANALYSIS

Dropbox (W07) -- The Gold Standard Public Application

What they wrote for "What does your company do?":

"Dropbox synchronizes files across your/your team's computers. It's much better than uploading or email, because it's automatic, integrated into Windows, and fits into the way you already work."

The analogy that worked:

"Dropbox is kind of like taking the best elements of subversion, trac and rsync and making them 'just work' for the average individual or team. Hackers have access to these tools, but normal people don't."

The "sister test":

"It takes concepts that are proven winners from the dev community (version control, changelogs/trac, rsync, etc.) and puts them in a package that my little sister can figure out."

Key patterns: Crystal clear language, concrete examples, developer-to-consumer bridge, explains complex tech simply.

Airbnb (W09)

- * Application was submitted late
- * Partners didn't love the idea; users weren't showing growth
- * But: "The founders seemed so full of energy that it was impossible not to like them"
- * The cereal stunt (Obama O's / Cap'n McCain's) proved hustle: "If you can sell \$4 cereal for \$40, you might be able to make this work"
- * Key lesson: Founder energy and resourcefulness can override weak metrics

DoorDash (S13)

- * Public application video available
- * Went public in 2020
- * Example of clear market thesis with execution proof

Other Publicly Available Applications

- * GitLab, Paystack, KeyWords AI, Buffer (rejected application also public)
- * Curated collections with 32+ real YC application examples available at shizune.co

Common Patterns in Successful Applications

1. Describe the company in 2 sentences + one specific example
2. Simple language (no jargon, no buzzwords)
3. Concrete traction numbers with timeframes
4. Non-obvious insight that shows deep domain knowledge
5. Impressive founder accomplishments (not titles or credentials)

5. REQUESTS FOR STARTUPS (RFS) -- Current Priorities

Spring 2026 RFS (MOST RECENT -- 10 Categories)

Core thesis: Every category assumes AI as the foundation, not a feature. The era of "add AI to your app" is over. YC wants companies that are AI-native from day one -- where removing AI would mean the business couldn't exist.

1. Cursor for Product Managers - AI-native system for product discovery: analyzing customer interviews, usage data, recommending features with UI/data model changes and dev tasks
2. AI-Native Hedge Funds - Investment funds using swarms of AI agents to analyze financial documents and execute trades, going beyond traditional quant strategies
3. AI-Native Agencies - Service businesses leveraging AI to produce deliverables (design, video ads, legal docs) at software-like margins, not human-service margins
4. Stablecoin Financial Services - Financial products built on stablecoins offering DeFi benefits (better yield, tokenized real-world assets) under compliance frameworks
5. AI for Government - Tools helping government agencies process applications and forms at scale as AI-generated submissions increase dramatically
6. Modern Metal Mills - Software-defined manufacturing systems reducing lead times and energy costs in aluminum rolling and steel tube production through AI planning + automation
7. AI Guidance for Physical Work - Real-time AI coaching for field services, manufacturing, healthcare workers using multimodal models + wearables
8. Large Spatial Models - AI foundation models treating geometry and physical structure as first-class primitives for reasoning about physical objects and environments
9. Infra for Government Fraud Hunters - Software accelerating False Claims Act investigations, organizing evidence and tracing corporate structures for whistleblower law firms
10. Make LLMs Easy to Train - Developer tools simplifying model training through accessible APIs, dataset management, and ML-focused development environments

Fall 2025 RFS

1. Retraining Workers for the AI Economy - "A new kind of vocational school for the AI economy"; physical infrastructure for AI (data centers, semiconductor fabs) creating shortage of skilled tradespeople
2. Video Generation - Photorealistic clips at marginal cost approaching zero; video as a new building block for software; AI-native successor to TikTok where every video is unique to a single viewer
3. Multi-Agent System Infrastructure - Tools to build, run, and maintain fleets of AI agents; distributed workflows where single runs fan out into many sub-agent calls
4. AI-Native Enterprise Software - AI embedded deeply throughout: "Cursor for sales, HR, and accounting"
5. The First 10-Person, \$100B Company - AI enabling tiny teams at massive scale; smaller, efficient teams winning through superior speed and execution
6. Government Consulting Replacement - US government spends \$100B+/year on consulting; AI can automate much of it

Ongoing 2025 RFS Themes

- * Vertical AI Agents - Industry-specific AI automation
- * AI Personal Staff for Everyone - AI assistants for individual productivity
- * Full-Stack AI Companies - Rebuild entire industries with AI-native operations
- * Secure AI App Store / OS Layer - User data protection + developer infrastructure
- * Voice AI - Phone calls haven't changed in 100 years; voice synthesis + recognition ready
- * Data Centers - Built faster and at lower cost for AI infrastructure
- * US Manufacturing with AI + Robotics - Industrial revitalization
- * Public Safety Technology
- * Climate Tech - Decarbonization, energy storage, climate adaptation
- * Spatial Computing - AR/VR applications
- * Onchain / Crypto - Stablecoins, low-cost chains, consumer wallets now ready
- * Defense Technology

- * Healthcare Accessibility
- * FinTech 2.0 - AI copilots for finance/accounting

Important Caveat from YC

"These represent just a fraction of what YC funds -- if one excites you, take it as extra validation to dive in, but you don't need to work on these ideas to apply to YC."

6. REJECTION REASONS & COMMON MISTAKES

Application-Level Mistakes

1. Vague descriptions - Reviewer doesn't know what the company does after reading the answer
2. Jargon and buzzwords - Technical language that obscures rather than clarifies
3. No technical founder - Team can't build an MVP; relies on external contractors
4. Zero proof of execution - Long descriptions with no evidence of building or shipping
5. No paying users for B2B - "If your users don't pay for your B2B product, you don't have a product yet"
6. Lack of commitment - Founders seeking validation rather than being "all in"
7. Fashionable ideas over authentic ones - Working on trendy problems instead of ones where they have genuine domain expertise

"Tarpit Ideas" (Dalton Caldwell's Framework)

- * Definition: Ideas that feel compelling, generate positive feedback, but are dead ends
- * Characteristics: (1) Feel sexy/exciting, (2) Get lots of encouragement from others, (3) Emotionally hard to pivot away from
- * Classic examples:
 - "Discover new restaurants/events/concerts" apps
 - Consumer apps requiring behavioral change without solving retention
 - AI features lacking differentiation in oversaturated markets
 - "Uber for X" clones

Interview-Level Mistakes

- * Over-preparation that leads to scripted, robotic answers
- * Founders talking over each other
- * Inability to explain the business simply in 1-2 sentences
- * No progress made between application submission and interview
- * Founders who haven't talked to users

Structural Rejections

- * Single non-technical founder trying to build complex SaaS
- * Ideas that are easy to understand but extremely hard to win at
- * No clear path to revenue or customer acquisition
- * Market deemed too small for venture-backed returns
- * Weak customer acquisition strategy

The "WhyNot" Reality (from YC's Official Page)

"The median application is usually pretty good. The reason it gets rejected is not that it seems particularly bad, but that there are a sufficient number of others that seem particularly good."

- * YC cannot respond to emails about why teams were rejected because "a lot of the time there's literally no answer"
- * ~97% of applicants get a rejection email
- * From the cutoff down to about the halfway point, applications are "pretty good" -- they got rejected not because something was wrong, but because enough others seemed better
- * Applications get better every funding cycle, and with limits on interview slots, genuinely promising groups must be turned away
- * Bottom line: Rejection often reflects the competitive nature of the process, not fundamental flaws

What Rejection Looks Like

- * Rejection: Email notification
- * Acceptance: Phone call from interviewing partner
- * Timeline: Within 24 hours of interview

7. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Format

- * Duration: 10 minutes over Zoom
- * Interviewers: 2-3 YC Partners
- * Style: No pleasantries, no introductions, no small talk -- questions start immediately
- * Partners have read the application and have it open during the call
- * All founders must be present

What They're Evaluating

1. Can the founders explain clearly what they're building and why?
2. Do the founders understand their market deeply?
3. Is there genuine founder chemistry and complementary skills?
4. Can the team think on their feet when challenged?
5. Have they made progress since applying?
6. Do they have non-obvious insights about their domain?

How to Prepare (YC's Own Advice)

- * Don't over-prepare: "Founders overprepare which does not increase the chances of their acceptance because it can make the interview more awkward"
- * Prepare 1-2 line answers to all likely questions
- * Do mock interviews: "Find a handful of friends who are willing to hop on a 15-minute call, grill you for 10 and tell you why they doubt you'll succeed for 5"
- * The goal is NOT rehearsed answers but comfort with any question
- * Best edge: "Work hard and have your startup improve between the time that you applied and the time that you interview"

Connection to Written Application

- * The interview is a deeper dive into the application, not a fresh conversation
- * Partners probe areas where the application was vague or interesting
- * Progress since application submission is a major positive signal
- * Inconsistencies between application claims and interview answers are red flags

Application Video (1 Minute)

- * Nothing except founders talking (no product demo -- that's separate)
- * Do NOT recite a script -- "just talk spontaneously as you would to a friend"
- * Show founder chemistry: "important for people to just be really comfortable with each other and not talk over one another"
- * Have a friend stand behind the camera and talk to them for natural delivery
- * Product demo is a separate submission (10s intro, 20s primary value prop, 20s secondary features, 10s outro)

8. 2024 AND 2025 BATCH DATA

W24 Batch (Winter 2024)

- * 260 companies from 27,000+ applications (0.96%)
- * 66% AI integration across the batch
- * 162 B2B companies (dominant category)
- * 54 women-founded startups (22%, up from ~16% prior batch -- highest proportion in 4+ batches)
- * Last batch under 2x/year model alongside S24

S24 Batch (Summer 2024)

- * 255 companies (one of the largest cohorts)
- * 67% categorized as AI (up from 51% in S23, 29% before that)
- * Team sizes: 54% two co-founders, 23% three founders
- * Education: 55% have Master's/PhD founder, 72% have CS background
- * Experience: 48% have a repeat founder, largest group from FAANG companies
- * Garry Tan's second batch; final cohort under 2-batch-per-year model

2025 Batches (Quarterly Model)

Batch	Size	Key Stat
W25	~150-200	Whole batch grew 10% per week in ..
X25 (Spring)	143	50%+ building agentic AI; 9 Europ..
S25	169	88% AI-native (141 of 160 compani..
F25	155+	92% AI (highest ever); focus on m..

F25 Batch Deep Dive (Fall 2025 -- 155+ companies)

- * 92% of companies incorporate AI into their core offerings -- AI itself is no longer the differentiator
- * AI Infrastructure: 13 startups building infra for AI agents (memory systems, agent integration platforms, dev platforms, observability tools, payment capabilities)

- Examples: Hyperspell (memory), Metorial (agent integration), Castari (dev platform), The Context Company (observability), Locus (payments)
- * Software Development: 21 companies -- largest enterprise tech application area, but fracturing into specialized niches as general coding tools achieve mass adoption
- * Physical AI & Robotics: Companies like Parametric (robotics RL models), Spatial AI, Cortex AI (datasets/simulation for autonomy)
- * Demo Day: Early December 2025, companies pitched to investors after launching with \$500K YC seed

AI Code Generation Stat (W25, per Garry Tan)

"For about a quarter of the current YC startups, 95% of their code was written by AI, with companies reaching as much as \$10 million in revenue with teams of less than 10 people."

Funding Benchmarks (2025)

- * Median seed round: \$3.1M
- * Healthcare startups: \$4.6M median (higher due to regulatory + development costs)
- * Total portfolio funding: \$145B+ raised by YC companies combined
- * YC participated in 100 fintech deals through September 2025 (65.4% increase over all of 2024)

9. REVENUE THRESHOLDS & TRACTION BENCHMARKS

At Application Stage

- * YC explicitly funds companies with zero revenue -- it's not a disqualifier
- * However, any traction dramatically improves chances
- * Key question: "How many active users do you have?" -- honesty is critical

At Demo Day (End of Batch)

Tier	% of Batch	Revenue	Valuation	Round
Top	5-10%	\$150K-\$500K ARR	\$20-25M post-money	\$2M, oversubscribed
Mid	~60%	\$3K-\$5K MRR	\$20M post-money	\$2M, not oversubscr..
Lower	~30%	Struggling / zero	Below \$20M	Harder to close

Growth Rate Benchmarks

- * 10% week-over-week growth is the current aggregate standard (W25 batch)
- * 5-7% WoW was previously considered strong
- * YC companies in 2025 are growing 5x faster than historical batches

Key Metrics YC Tracks

- * MRR / ARR
- * Week-over-week growth rate
- * Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)
- * Lifetime Value (LTV)

- * Churn rate
- * User engagement / DAU/MAU
- * Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- * Gross margins

Revenue Records (2025)

- * ~70% of companies now report meaningful revenue
- * Average revenue across entire cohort: ~\$66K
- * 12+ companies per batch now exceed \$500K revenue
- * One company closed at ~\$200M valuation at Demo Day (highest ever recorded)

10. SOLO FOUNDER ACCEPTANCE RATES

Current Statistics

- * Solo founders represent ~10% of recent YC batches (declining proportion)
- * Sam Altman (when YC president): "We really prefer at least two founders, but it's not a deal-breaker"
- * Acceptance rate for solo non-technical founders drops well below 0.6%

What Solo Founders Need

1. Proven traction - must have built something and shown it works
2. Previous startup success - repeat founders have much better odds
3. Deep domain expertise - clearly the world expert in their area
4. OR an exceptional idea - "really, really phenomenal" per YC partners

Success Paradox

- * Only 4% of YC's top 100 companies were started by solo founders
- * BUT solo founders who make it have a higher IPO rate: ~0.6% vs ~0.3% for teams
- * This suggests a strong survivorship bias: solo founders who get in are already exceptional

YC's Official Position (FAQ)

"We will consider applications from single founders, but we do prefer groups of two or three. One-person startups are really tough."

11. INTERNATIONAL FOUNDER STATISTICS

Geographic Headquarters (\$25 Data)

- * United States: 79% (126 of 160 companies)
- * UK: 3 companies

- * Germany: 2 companies
- * France, Canada, Singapore: 1 each
- * Overall: 85-90% North American across batches

Founder Origin (Regardless of HQ)

- * US origin: ~50% of founders
- * Asia: ~30%
- * Europe: ~12%
- * LATAM/Africa: ~8%

European Representation (Trending Up)

- * X25 (Spring 2025): 22 companies with European founders; 9 of 143 companies are European-HQ
- * France is the best-represented European country
- * Proportionally increasing: 6.3% in X25 vs 4.9% in S24

Key Insight

While YC is nominally open to international founders, the program strongly favors:

- * Founders willing to relocate to the Bay Area
- * Companies targeting the US market first
- * Teams with existing US connections (education, work experience)

12. VERTICAL / INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN (Recent Batches)

S25 Industry Breakdown (169 companies)

Category	Count	%
AI-Native	141	88%
B2B Software	108	68%
Deep Technology	17	11%
B2C Consumer	12	8%
FinTech	~8-10	~5-6%
Industrial Tech	6	4%
GovTech	~5	~3%
Logistics	~4	~2%

AI Sub-Categories (S25, 70+ companies across 18 categories)

- * Agentic AI solutions (largest single category)
- * Vertical AI agents (industry-specific)
- * AI infrastructure / developer tools
- * AI for healthcare
- * AI for finance/accounting
- * AI for legal
- * AI for sales/marketing

- * Multi-agent systems
- * Voice AI
- * Video generation AI

Historical AI Trend

Batch	AI %	Notes
Pre-S23	~29%	Baseline
S23	51%	First majority-AI batch
W24	66%	
S24	67%	
W25	~36% AI agents (58/163)	10% WoW aggregate growth
X25	50%+ agentic AI (67/144)	46% specifically AI agent cos
S25	88% (141/160)	Only 10 companies without AI; 50%..
F25	92%	Highest ever; 21 software dev cos..

B2B vs B2C Shift

- * YC has shifted dramatically from consumer to B2B over the past decade
- * W24: 162 of 260 companies (62%) were B2B
- * Consumer apps are now a small minority and often flagged as "tar-pit" risks

Healthcare

- * Consistently funded but capital-intensive
- * Median seed round: \$4.6M (vs \$3.1M overall)
- * 19% of agentic AI companies in X25 target healthcare/financial services

FinTech

- * Major resurgence in 2025: 100 fintech deals through September
- * 65.4% increase over all of 2024
- * Many folded into "AI copilots for finance/accounting" category

13. APPLICATION PROCESS CHANGES (2025-2026)

Structural Changes

1. Four batches per year (since 2025): Winter (W), Spring (X), Summer (S), Fall (F) -- up from 2 batches
2. Smaller batch sizes: ~150 companies per batch vs ~250 previously
3. Multiple decision tracks: Early, standard, and late applications with different timelines
4. Early Decision for Students: Apply while in school, defer participation until after graduation (launched Sept 2025)
5. YC no longer asks "How will you make money?" first -- they now ask "Who desperately needs this?"

Application Format & Requirements (Current)

- * Online form asking about startup, team, idea, progress, and goals
- * No traditional documents (transcripts, essays) unless asked later

- * 1-minute founder video (just founders talking, no product demo)
- * Separate product demo video (10s intro, 20s primary value, 20s secondary, 10s outro)
- * All founders must be present for interview if invited

What Has Changed in Evaluation (2025-2026 vs Prior)

- * MVP in private beta is now table stakes -- in 2025, a working product builds immediate credibility
- * AI-native is the baseline -- "add AI to your app" era is over; YC wants companies where removing AI = business can't exist
- * "Vibe coding" acknowledged -- 25% of W25 batch had 95% AI-written code; this is acceptable and even celebrated
- * Revenue bars rising: 12+ companies per batch now exceed \$500K revenue; ~70% report meaningful revenue
- * Speed of iteration matters more than ever -- with AI coding tools, the expectation is faster shipping cycles
- * B2B heavily favored over consumer -- 60-68% of companies are B2B; consumer apps flagged as "tarpit" risks

Key Partner Departures Affecting Application Review

- * Dalton Caldwell -- transitioned to Partner Emeritus mid-2025 (co-founded Standard Capital with Paul Buchheit)
- * Michael Seibel -- transitioned to Partner Emeritus (continues limited office hours with portfolio)
- * Both were central to application review for 12+ years; new partners now lead the process

APPENDIX: KEY NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

Metric	Value
Acceptance rate	1-1.5% (some batches <1%)
Applications per year	70,000-80,000 (per Garry Tan)
Batch size (2025)	~150-170 (quarterly)
Investment per company	\$500,000
YC equity stake	7% (fixed) + MFN SAFE
Total YC companies funded	5,300+
Combined portfolio value	\$800B+
Unicorns (100+)	100+
Public companies	12+
Total funding raised by YC cos	\$145B+
Solo founders in batch	~10%
AI companies (S25)	88%
AI companies (F25)	92%
B2B companies (typical)	60-68%
Women-founded (W24)	22%
US-headquartered	79-90%
Founders with CS background	72%
Founders with Masters/PhD	55%
Repeat founders	48%
Interview duration	10 minutes
Decision notification	Within 24 hours
Companies with 95% AI-written code	~25% of W25 batch
Median seed round (2025)	\$3.1M
W25 aggregate growth rate	10% week-over-week

SOURCES

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- * YC Acceptance Rate - Leland
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- * YC Interview Guide
- * 5 Key Elements - Michael Seibel
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- * Dalton Caldwell on RFS (Fortune)
- * Garry Tan: Billion-Dollar Misfits (Knowledge Project)
- * Garry Tan: YC Startups Growing 5X Faster (Mixergy)
- * Gustaf Alstromer - Lessons from 600+ YC Startups
- * Dropbox Original YC Application
- * 32 Successful YC Application Examples
- * Requests for Startups - YC
- * YC's Latest RFS
- * 1000+ YC Requested Startups Fall 2025
- * YC RFS AI Trends
- * What We Learned From Five Failed YC Applications
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- * Benchmarks for Valuation and Traction at YC
- * YC Seed Round Size 2025 Benchmarks
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- * W24 Batch Historical Comparison
- * 50% of YC W24 Built with AI (Crunchbase)
- * YC S25 Batch Analysis - Extract AI
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- * YC Going All-In on AI Agents (PitchBook)
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- * Solo Founders - SaaStr/YC
- * European Startups in YC Spring Batch (Sifted)
- * YC Standard Deal
- * The Application Video - YC
- * YC FAQ
- * Buffer Rejected YC Application
- * Y Combinator Comprehensive Analysis (ByteBridge)
- * GrowthList YC Startups Guide
- * YC Spring 2026 RFS - Superframeworks
- * YC 2026 RFS - 10 Key Sectors (Phemex)
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- * YC 2025 Startup Wishlist (Medium)
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- * YC Early Decision Program
- * YC Expanding to Four Cohorts (TechCrunch)
- * YC F25 Full Batch - Ollie Forsyth
- * How YC F25 Maps Next Phase of AI (CB Insights)

- * YC S25 Batch Analysis - Extract AI
- * YC's 2025 Batches: Analysis of 407 Startups (Medium)
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- * YC Application Tips 2025 (Flowjam)
- * How to Get Into YC: Full F25 Pack
- * Apply to YC Accelerator 2025-2026 (xraise)
- * YC x Coinbase RFS: Build Onchain
- * Dalton Caldwell Lessons from 1,000+ YC Startups (Lenny's)
- * YC WhyNot Page
- * Michael Seibel Pitching Guide (SaaStr)
- * YC Startup Application (Inkle)
- * YC Spring 2026 Application (Startup Researcher)