

Vision: What future we want to create? To be known as the best B-School for aspiring management leaders in the country with an industry-focused curriculum and practice.

Mission: Why we exist? To create value for students, business and society by providing intellectual leadership, advancing the science and practice of management, and developing confident leaders to be the agents of change in a world driven by data, technology and innovation.

STARTUP SPARK

YOUR FORTNIGHTLY GUIDE TO INDIA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL NEWS

ISSUE #44 | FEB 09, 2026



Student Funding Reimagined: From Scarcity to Structured Opportunity

For years, student entrepreneurship in India was shaped by scarcity of capital, of support, and often, of belief. Funding conversations usually began after graduation, once students had “proved” themselves in the real world. That assumption no longer holds.

Today, student founders operate in a very different ecosystem—one where funding is structured around learning curves, early experimentation, and long-term potential rather than immediate scale. Capital is no longer only about backing finished businesses; it is about enabling discovery, iteration, and informed risk-taking.

In this edition of Startup Spark, we take a fresh, practical look at student funding—the options available, how they work, and how students can engage with the startup ecosystem even before becoming founders.

From Campus to Capital: Understanding Student Funding Today

India’s startup ecosystem has quietly built a layered funding pipeline for students—one that mirrors how ideas actually evolve on campus. Instead of a single leap from idea to investor, student founders now move through stages of capital, each serving a distinct purpose.

THE FIRST LAYER – LEARNING CAPITAL

Campus Grants and University Support. Many universities now offer:

- Innovation and seed grants
- Hackathon and pitch competition awards
- Access to incubation centres, labs, and mentors

This form of funding is typically non-dilutive, allowing students to experiment without pressure. Its primary role is not growth—but learning. It helps students test assumptions, build prototypes, and understand customer problems before chasing scale. For most student founders, this is where the entrepreneurial journey should begin.



Government Programs and Pre-Incubation Support

Government-backed initiatives under the Startup India umbrella and allied programs support students through:

- Prototype and proof-of-concept grants
- Technical and domain mentoring
- Access to recognised incubators

These programs reduce early risk and encourage disciplined experimentation, helping ideas mature before approaching equity investors.

THE SECOND LAYER – EARLY RISK CAPITAL

Student-Focused Venture Funds

A new generation of venture funds has emerged with a singular focus: **student and recent graduate founders**. These funds invest at the **idea or MVP (Minimum Viable Product)** stage and are designed to work with founders who are still learning. Their value lies not just in capital, but in:

- Structured mentorship
- Exposure to investor thinking
- Access to founder and operator networks

Unlike traditional venture capital, these funds prioritise founder potential, clarity of thought, and understanding of problems over polish and scale.

Angels and Early-Stage Investors

Once a student startup shows early traction, users, pilots, or initial revenue, angel investors often step in. These investors typically come through:

- Alumni networks
- Faculty and mentor introductions
- Incubators and demo days
- Networks & Events/Conferences

At this stage, what matters most is not aggressive growth, but founder credibility and evidence of learning.

Crowdfunding and Community Capital

For certain categories—consumer products, creative technology, and impact ventures—crowdfunding offers an alternate path. Beyond capital, it provides:

- Early market validation
- Direct customer feedback
- A community of early believers

For students, this route also doubles up as a powerful learning experience in storytelling, demand sensing, and community building.

BEYOND FOUNDING – NEW WAYS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Not Every Entrepreneur Starts as a Founder

One of the most important shifts in the startup ecosystem is the recognition that entrepreneurship is not limited to founding companies. Students today can participate meaningfully as:

- Startup researchers and analysts
- Early team members
- Community builders
- Startup scouts

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These roles offer exposure to decision-making, pattern recognition, and business evaluation—skills that are foundational to entrepreneurship.

The Rise of the Student Startup Scout

Startup scouts help identify promising early-stage ideas and founding teams. In doing so, they:

- Learn how investors evaluate opportunities
- Build strong networks across campuses and ecosystems
- Develop judgment and business intuition
- Earn incentives by contributing to successful deal discovery

For students interested in venture capital, consulting, or entrepreneurship, scouting is a powerful way to learn while earning—without the pressure of running a startup.

HOW STUDENTS SHOULD THINK ABOUT FUNDING

Before pursuing capital, students should ask:

- What stage is my idea really at?
- Do I need funding—or feedback?
- What kind of capital will help me learn faster, not rush decisions?

The most effective student founders use capital as a tool for learning, not as a badge of success.

CAMPUS NOTE

Campus Fund Visit: A Live View into Student Investing

As a fitting close to this edition, we reflect on today's campus interaction with Preksha Sharma from the Founder's Office at Campus Fund. During her visit, Preksha shared how Campus Fund operates as a student-focused investment platform, why universities are becoming the starting point for future global companies, and what investors realistically look for in student-led startups.

A key takeaway for students was the opportunity to engage with the ecosystem not only as founders, but also as startup scouts—identifying promising ventures, contributing to deal flow, and earning incentives while building deep exposure to early-stage investing. The session reinforced an important message: capital today is accessible, but discernment and intent matter far more than speed.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Student entrepreneurship in India has entered a new phase. Funding is no longer the primary constraint. What differentiates outcomes now is clarity of thought, quality of engagement, and the willingness to learn—whether as a founder or as a participant in the broader ecosystem.



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