

# Unique Challenges and Prospects for Early-Stage Clean Technology Start-Ups

Ushering in the next industrial revolution will be the entrepreneurs, engineers, and investors of clean technology start-ups (no bias intended). Endowed with this important task, how can entrepreneurs in particular avoid the pitfalls that land many clean technologies in the “valley of death?” What mixture of ingredients are needed (and to what measure) to propel a clean-tech start-up from fledgling to blockbuster? Zooming in on the most embryonic stage in a start-up lifecycle, we address the strategic and managerial challenges faced by clean technology start-ups, from excavating the funding landscape to unveiling a product.

*This seminar is intended for clean technology start-up entrepreneurs.*

**Date:** Wednesday August 18, 8:30am-11:30am  
**Location:** Palo Alto  
**Target group:** Early-stage clean technology start-ups, investors

**8:30am** Reception, networking and continental breakfast  
**9:00am** Panel discussion begins

## 1. The Funding Challenge

- ▶ What kind of funding to pursue? *Angel investors? Government grants (DOE, state)? Venture Capitalists (specialists vs. generalists)? Seed firms? Early-stage acquisitions by larger corporations?*
- ▶ Timing: when to approach investors?
- ▶ A balancing act: how to find funding without ceding control?
- ▶ How do you proceed if your valuation expectation is not met by your potential investor?

## 2. Designing the Cleantech Dream-House: Management Challenges

- ▶ The pressure to perform: balancing the need for long-term R&D with the need to reach profitability/bring a product to market?
- ▶ How much information to share and when (to investors, potential partners, employees, etc.)?
- ▶ To patent or not to patent (and when)?
- ▶ The largest impediment (arguably) to cleantech investment is the high capital costs. How to do you thus achieve capital efficiency?
- ▶ How do you determine your P&L targets?
- ▶ Controlling your value chain: should you integrate your business from raw material to end product? If not, how to establish relationships with suppliers, distributors, etc?

## 3. Atop the Pyramid: Strategic Positioning

- ▶ Disruptive innovation requires experimentation—should this take the form of parallel development activities and quick prototyping, or a singular, considered solution?
- ▶ Innovating from existing technologies vs. new invention.
- ▶ The fish and the pond: making inroads into a fringe market vs. focus on a more mainstream application domain.

## 4. The Entrepreneur’s Toolbox

- ▶ Incubators/Acceleration Platforms: What are the tools that help startups succeed today?
- ▶ Playing Matchmaker: Are there reliable professional pairing networks?

## 5. Coming Out of the Stealth Shell: Reaching your Customers

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- ▶ Where to look for customers and when to shift from your technology and internal development to customers?
- ▶ Do you ever re-define your product based on initial customer needs/desires?

### 6. Preening your Cleantech Feathers: Strategies for Attracting Investors

- ▶ Proving your staying power: How to avoid being viewed as a fad/trendy technology?
- ▶ Mastering the adaptability and resiliency quotient (preparing for multiple futures, uncertainty).
- ▶ The role of vision, optimism, realism, hustle, and external checks & balances.

### 7. A Macro Appraisal

- ▶ Sizing up the market opportunity in terms of size and timing.
- ▶ Government spending/subsidies for early-stage clean technologies: year-out predictions.

**10:30am**      **End of panel discussion: Q&A, networking**

**11:30am**      **End of conference**

*Please contact [Kimberly.Schoemaker@agrion.org](mailto:Kimberly.Schoemaker@agrion.org) for any further questions*

*Please register directly in the section of the program after creating your profile on [www.agrion.org](http://www.agrion.org).*