WOMEN'S EQUITY LAB
LABO D'INVESTISSEMENT POUR LES FEMMES

Submission for the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultations

September 8, 2026

Photos: WEL leadership at NACO Summit (Photos 1 and 2) and the 2026 WEL National Symposium (Photo 3).

Submitted by:

Women's Equity Lab (WEL)

WOMEN'S EQUITY LAB
LABO D'INVESTISSEMENT POUR LES FEMMES

Submission for the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultations

Submitted by: Women's Equity Lab (WEL)

Date: September 8, 2026

Recommendation

Budget 2026 should invest **$10 million over five years** ($2 million annually) in Women's Equity Lab (WEL) to activate **more than 1,000 women as angel investors** (double the current number) and to directly mobilize **over $50 million in new private early-stage capital** into Canadian-owned companies.

Canada's innovation economy, and above all its AI economy, cannot thrive without Canadian capital. Women are now the fastest-growing source of that capital, yet very little of it reaches early-stage companies.

WEL is the proven mechanism that changes this: angel investors participating in WEL funds already account for roughly 10% of all investors in Canada's reporting angel networks and 25% of women angels coast to coast. 500 women investors through WEL have already invested $7 million in capital in more than 75 early-stage companies.

WEL is not short on demand or results. We're short of the not-for-profit capacity required to produce them. Women angel investors supply every dollar of investment capital. Government funding provides the education, recruitment, and regional expansion that bring those investors to the table.

Two million dollars a year closes that gap. WEL has demonstrated that for every dollar of government funding, WEL secures $5 in new angel capital from WEL investors. A $10 million investment returns more than $50 million in private early-stage capital, grows Canada's community of women angel investors past 1,000, gives them access to a women-led investing platform, and builds Canadian-owned companies that create jobs, generate revenue, and keep their intellectual property in Canada. It also puts women in the room where Canada's AI companies are funded, at the moment when ownership is decided.

Introduction

Budget 2026 is being built around boosting investment and competition, strengthening sovereignty, and meeting pressing economic challenges. Delivering on all three means unlocking private capital that public dollars alone cannot supply. Budget 2025 set the scale of the task: $500 billion in additional private-sector investment over five years. Right now, capital needed to meet that target is sitting on the sidelines.

By 2030, women are expected to control two-thirds of global private wealth. In Canada, women will manage over $4.7 trillion by 2028, nearly double the $2.2 trillion held in 2023.[1] Yet very little of that capital reaches the innovation economy.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states the innovation gender gap plainly: currently, women are nearly 40% of top wealth holders in the United States but account for under 20% of its angel investors. In Europe, women are under 10% of angel investors.[2] The ways into early-stage investing were never designed with women investors in mind. Redirecting even a fraction of that capital toward innovation can change a country's growth trajectory.

Canada's startups are essential drivers of innovation, job creation, and long-term growth. One of their greatest challenges, especially for women-led startups, is securing early-stage funding to move from concept to a scalable business.[3] Angel investors supply what founders cannot get elsewhere: capital, hands-on training, and mentorship. When angels back a company, they attract talent, strengthen local innovation clusters, and help build globally competitive, Canadian-owned firms.

The Government of Canada has emphasized the need to use public dollars to leverage greater private investment. That is exactly what Women's Equity Lab does.

Canada is making progress towards a more inclusive innovation economy, and we know why.

Women's participation in reporting Canadian angel networks reached a record **40% in 2025,** up from 14% in 2017.[4] That gain is the product of organizations that deliberately recruit, train, and fund new women investors.

Women's Equity Lab (WEL) is one of the largest. For scale, the National Angel Capital Organization (NACO) reports more than 4,000 angel investors across more than 100 reporting organizations nationwide, roughly 1,600 of whom are women.[4] WEL reported more than 400 women angel investors in that count: **WEL constitutes 10% of angel investors in NACO's report**, **and 25% of the women**. And WEL has only grown since. WEL now has 8 Investment Groups operating in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Manitoba, Toronto, London, Montréal and Atlantic Canada.

The 40% figure reported by NACO measures women as a percentage of angels in organized angel groups. No dataset captures those investing outside them. The conclusion is straightforward: Canada's headline is strong precisely because organized groups do the recruiting, and that participation outside them is considerably lower. The policy conclusion follows: fund the mechanisms producing the gain, and extend our reach.

The stakes are highest in AI innovation.

Nowhere does the question of who allocates capital matter more than in artificial intelligence, which the government has named central to competitiveness and economic sovereignty.[5]

Women are underrepresented in those decisions. Research indicates women adopt generative AI at lower rates not because they are risk-averse but because they are risk-aware, attuned to the bias, opacity, and governance gaps in systems they were excluded from building.[6] That scrutiny is exactly what responsible AI investment requires.

Currently, **no national AI-investing education in Canada** is designed by women investors, for women investors. WEL seeks to build it: a **free bilingual AI investor education program**, **a national AI-focused Investment Group**, and **AI due diligence capacity across our eight regional Investment Groups** coast-to-coast. This AI-focused education would enhance WEL's existing education model.

About WEL National

Since 2017, more than **500 women investors** through WEL have invested **$7 million in capital,** including co-investments, across **97 investments in more than 75 early-stage companies.**

The pace is accelerating. In the past twelve months, WEL activated roughly $1.5 million into 13 Canadian companies, opened new Investment Groups in **Calgary, Montréal**, and **London**, Ontario, and closed new follow-on funds in **Victoria, Manitoba, Atlantic Canada, Toronto**, and **Vancouver**.

For each fund, a group of 25 to 60 women pool about $5,500 each for a combined capital of $150K-$300K. Led by a volunteer Managing Partner team, the investors decide which 3 to 5 companies to invest in. Our model democratizes investing with a lower barrier to entry and more fulsome engagement throughout the life of the fund, including investor collaboration in sourcing deals, conducting due diligence, and making final investment decisions. Our Learning on Investment™ (LOI) approach allows women to start investing while gaining valuable investment skill sets and building expertise alongside a network of peers.

WEL delivers our work through a bifurcated model with (i) a not-for-profit that powers the educational programming, ecosystem engagement, data systems, and regional growth and (ii) a for-profit corporate entity that operates a series of regional Investment Groups, each with their own funds. The for-profit entities are funded entirely by investors. However, WEL's not-for-profit arm, like most peer organizations around the world, needs government support and sponsorships to sustain our angel education and expansion work.

Proven Impact and Outcomes

WEL-backed companies have launched sector-disrupting products across AI, digital health, consumer products, and clean technology, adding more than 300 jobs and generating over $100 million in annual recurring revenue.

About **80% of WEL investors are new to angel investing**, meaning WEL is bringing new private capital into the innovation economy. And those new angels are making recurring investments.

An independent evaluation completed in June 2025, with a 50% response rate among all WEL investors since 2017, confirms it.[7] Of those surveyed, 74% said WEL prepared them to be an angel investor and 77% built meaningful new professional networks. Most significant for the public return: **60% came back to invest in subsequent WEL funds, and 87% are continuing or open to making new angel investments**. WEL does not place a woman in a single deal. It produces a recurring investor.

The capital also flows to founders the market has overlooked. Roughly 71% of WEL investments are in companies led or founded by women, and 84% are in companies led by founders underrepresented among recipients of early-stage capital, compared with a market where women own 21% of Canadian businesses but women-led companies receive less than 4% of venture capital.[8]

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) supported the creation of this pipeline. Last year, approximately **$250,000 in WAGE funding unlocked $1.5 million in angel investment, a 1:6 ratio**. And that doesn't even count the additional capital drawn into rounds by WEL's participation, the jobs created, or the revenue generated.

The Case for Federal Support

Organized angel networks need resources for administration, education, network building, and mentorship. Program fees cannot sustain the full scope of the work. In most thriving early-stage ecosystems, non-profit angel networks receive public support to keep capital and expertise flowing to entrepreneurs.

WEL is not asking the public purse to cover the cost of expanding this model alone. WEL's Managing Partners and members contribute **more than $500,000 a year in volunteer time**, running due diligence, mentoring founders, and bringing new women into the network. Long-term, predictable federal funding does not replace that contribution. It unlocks and catalyzes more of it.

The federal pilot through WAGE worked, and Canada's record participation rate is partly a return on that public investment. Writing in that same OECD report, Professor Barbara Orser of the University of Ottawa concludes that Canada must move beyond "ad hoc programming to constructing a national policy framework."[9] A five-year, pan-Canadian commitment is that shift. The question is whether Canada scales a proven mechanism or lets it plateau.

We recommend that Budget 2026 provide $10 million in funding to WEL National ($2 million annually).

This will grow WEL's network to surpass 1,000 women investors, roughly double today's base. At the demonstrated 1:5 ratio, $10 million in government funding mobilizes more than $50 million in private early-stage capital over five years, building Canadian-owned companies that create jobs, generate revenue, and keep their intellectual property in Canada.

The ratio holds at scale for three reasons:

- The national infrastructure is already built, financed by the WAGE pilot, so each new Investment Group launches against fixed assets rather than creating them.
- The constraint is capacity, not demand: new regions and new investors consistently approach WEL faster than it can respond.
- And the model compounds, with 60% of investors returning for subsequent funds.

Complementing Canada's Early-Stage Capital Agenda

This recommendation reinforces rather than duplicates the measures already before the Government.

Budget 2025 committed $750 million to a strategy for firms facing early growth-stage funding gaps, alongside $1 billion for BDC's Venture and Growth Capital Catalyst Initiative. The National Angel Capital Organization (NACO) has recommended that part of that envelope be used to stabilize and professionalize the organizations making first-cheque investments, and to strengthen regional access outside major urban centres. Budget 2026 is the moment to ensure that envelope reaches the organizations that activate new investors, not only the funds that deploy capital.[10]

The OECD reaches the same conclusion from a different direction. Its 2025 report on financing women entrepreneurs recommends that governments support the creation of women's angel networks through training and financial support, and co-invest with them through public and private mechanisms.[2]

WEL is a genuinely national network. Our Investment Groups operate in large and mid-size cities across the country, including Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, London, Toronto, Montréal, and across Atlantic Canada. Additional funding would extend that reach to rural, remote, and northern communities, where a new WEL virtual delivery model can put angel investing within reach of women far from any innovation hub.

As the Canada Strong Fund builds sovereign investment capacity from the top of the market, WEL builds it from the bottom. Both serve the same objective: keeping Canadian companies, and the intellectual property and jobs they create, in Canadian hands.

Alignment with Government Priorities

1. **Build one Canadian economy.**
   WEL's national platform connects regional Investment Groups and moves capital from women investors to high-potential businesses across provincial lines.
2. **Spend less, catalyze private investment.**
   At a demonstrated 1:5 ratio, $10 million mobilizes more than $50 million in private early-stage capital advancing the government's target of catalyzing $500 billion in additional private-sector investment
3. **Attract and develop talent.**
   Every WEL investor trains in due diligence, portfolio strategy, and governance, building a durable pool of Canadian capital expertise.
4. **Lead in science and innovation, starting with AI.**
   As Canada invests in sovereign AI capacity, WEL builds the other half of AI sovereignty: a domestic investor base that can rigorously evaluate AI ventures and is intent on keeping them Canadian-owned.
5. **Strengthen economic sovereignty.**
   Increasing domestic investment capacity helps more Canadian companies scale while remaining Canadian-owned and operated.
6. **Turn a generational wealth transfer into Canadian investment.**
   Women's private wealth in Canada is nearly doubling, from $2.2 trillion in 2023 to over $4.7 trillion by 2028.[1] WEL is the mechanism that brings that wealth off the sidelines and into angel investing, closing the equity gap in who funds Canadian companies at the very moment women's economic power is rising fastest.

Conclusion

We share the government's ambition to build the strongest economy in the G7 and to make Canada a leading hub for science and innovation. That means unlocking every source of domestic capital. Canadian women hold trillions of dollars and are ready to deploy it. What they need is the on-ramp.

WEL has built that on-ramp and proven it works. A **$10 million partnership** will scale it nationally, activate **1,000 women as investors**, and return **more than $50 million in private early-stage capital** to Canadian founders. It will also put women in the room where Canada's AI companies are funded, at the moment that decision is made. Budget 2026 can make that commitment.

For more information, please contact Nagma Dhillon, National Program Manager, Women's Equity Lab, at nagma.dhillon@womensequitylab.com.

References

1. Ali, M. (2024). Women to control $4 trillion in wealth by 2028. Wealth Professional.
2. OECD (2025). *Bridging the Finance Gap for Women Entrepreneurs.* OECD Publishing and the Global Women's Entrepreneurship Policy Network.
3. Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (2024). The State of Women's Entrepreneurship in Canada.
4. NACO (2026). Canadian Angel Investment Falls to Five-Year Low at $113.79 Million in 2025 while Women's Participation Hits a Record 40%.
5. Government of Canada (2025). Budget 2025: Canada Strong, Chapter One.
6. Bolis, M. (2025). *The AI gender gap paradox.* Stanford Social Innovation Review.
7. Women's Equity Lab (2025). *Independent evaluation survey of WEL investors.* 50% response rate.
8. Smith School of Business, Queen's University (2025). How Investors Can Help Close the Gender Funding Gap.
9. Orser, B. (2025). “Canada: Policy insights,” in OECD, Bridging the Finance Gap for Women Entrepreneurs.
10. NACO (2026). *Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations.*