

The Forum for Women Entrepreneurs Secures \$2.1M to Ignite Canada's Untapped Economic Potential of Women Entrepreneurs

The Forum for Women Entrepreneurs Secures \$2.1M from Vancouver's philanthropic community for bold 3-year strategy to fuel women entrepreneurs

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA, November 17, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Forum](#) announced today that early philanthropic leadership in Vancouver has fueled more than \$2.1 million in initial investment, marking the beginning of an ambitious national movement. This early wave of generosity—led by Kate Dunstan and Charles and Eve Chang—are powering new initiatives designed to elevate women-led businesses with high growth potential and strengthen Canada's economy. The funding represents the first step in The Forum's larger vision to unlock Canada's \$150 billion in untapped GDP potential by dismantling the barriers that prevent women entrepreneurs from scaling. The Forum's women-focused three-year strategy is the first coordinated effort of its kind in Canada.

"The time is now to address the crisis of potential facing women entrepreneurs in Canada," said Kirsten

Koppang Telford, CEO of The Forum. "Despite women owning nearly 18% of Canadian SMEs, they remain only half as likely to surpass \$500K in revenue and receive just four percent of venture capital funding. The Forum's plan aims to change that. Research shows that leveling the playing field could add \$150 billion to Canada's GDP. Our bold three-year strategy, with support from



Kirsten Koppang Telford, CEO of The Forum, addresses the audience at the Odium Brown Forum Pitch Semi Final

THE Forum

Black and white logo saying The Forum



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*Kirsten Koppang Telford, CEO
of The Forum*

Canada's business leaders, demonstrates our alignment and commitment to targeting the roots of these systemic barriers."

Phase 1 begins this fall with national data collection and pilot projects to identify and prove the most persistent scaling barriers facing women-led businesses. Using data, research, and lived experience, The Forum will validate where and why women founders are running into barriers to growth. Building on these insights, The Forum will launch and is testing new solutions including The Forum 200 initiative for scaling businesses, The Forum's AI Skills Lab, Sweet Futures, and the Capital Roadmap

Program—initiatives designed to meet entrepreneurs at critical inflection points and demonstrate what works to unlock growth at scale across Canada.

Born in Vancouver, The Forum has become a national force and now local philanthropists will accelerate its scaling across Canada. The \$2.1 million in charitable funding marks the beginning of a collective effort among Vancouver's business and philanthropic leaders to build a stronger, more equitable Canadian economy. Major donors include The Kathryn Dunstan Family Foundation, The Charles and Eve Chang Foundation, Tara Bosch (Founder), Judy Brooks (Chair) and Cindy Bokitch (COO) of the original SmartSweets team, Christina (Founder & Chair Emeritus, The Forum) & Matthew Anthony, Amar & Natallie Doman of The BC Lions, Charlotte Faulkner of Odium Brown, and the Peter & Joanne Brown Foundation. The backing demonstrates broad recognition that investing in women entrepreneurs delivers strong returns while building a more equitable economic future

Kate Dunstan, a philanthropist whose family foundation is among The Forum's lead donors, emphasizes the importance of network and community for women entrepreneurs. "The Forum gives women what so many men already have - a network that believes in them," said Dunstan. "There are so many brilliant women out there with big ideas. But without the early capital or network, those ideas can stall. I want to be part of the circle that lifts women up."

The milestone funding comes as The Forum celebrates the 10th Anniversary of The Odium Brown Forum Pitch Finale, its flagship event and example of how targeted support and visibility can unlock women's potential.

In nine years, The Odium Brown Forum Pitch has demonstrated significant economic impact, with 27 finalists raising over \$25 million and creating more than 500 jobs, while 71 semi-finalists have raised over \$41.6 million and generated an additional 500+ positions. Individual finalists have raised an average of \$1 million after participating in the program.

Charles Chang, Founder of Lyra Growth Partners, has been connected to The Forum since its earliest days, "I've backed a lot of founders, and when women-led ventures get the same access to capital and networks, they consistently deliver. The talent and discipline are there — it's the gap in access to economic support that's the challenge. Programs like The Forum's help level that playing field, and that's where real growth for Canadian business starts."

Now in its 24th year, The Forum has supported more than 20,000 women-led businesses and built the evidence base, networks, and community needed to shift Canada's entrepreneurial landscape. Today, it serves over 2,000 entrepreneurs annually through a national network of 50,000 alumnae, supporters, and champions working together to connect entrepreneurs directly to the mentors, partners, and funders they need to succeed.

The Forum is building the foundation for a more equitable and prosperous economic future in Canada—one where women entrepreneurs thrive at every stage of growth and drive greater productivity. Through its strategy and supportive community, The Forum is fueling growth and ensuring Canada doesn't leave billions in untapped potential on the table.

The Forum is actively seeking additional philanthropic leaders to support its three-year plan and beyond.

"We are deeply grateful to our major donors who have stepped forward with such conviction and generosity," said Koppang Telford. "They are co-creating a national movement—opening doors, sharing their networks, and championing the potential of women entrepreneurs. This is what transformational philanthropy looks like, and it's what will enable us to achieve our ambitious goals."

In the months ahead, The Forum will move from insight to action, piloting new programs, partnerships, and capital pathways to test what truly accelerates women's growth in Canada's entrepreneurial economy.

The Forum is Canada's national charity unlocking the economic power of women entrepreneurs at scale. Now in its 24th year, The Forum has championed the belief that when women entrepreneurs thrive, entire communities flourish. The Forum supports all women nationally and offers a welcoming space to self-identifying women, trans-femme, and non-binary entrepreneurs. In the past year alone, The Forum supported 2,365 entrepreneurs across 11 provinces and territories, contributing to a total of more than 20,000 women entrepreneurs supported to date through programs such as [The Odium Brown Forum Pitch Program](#), The Forum Mentor Program, The Forum E-Series, and AI Skills Lab Canada.

Visit www.theforum.ca for more information.

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