

RECOMMENDATIONS ON A NATIONAL WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Prepared by Women's Enterprise Organization of Canada (WEOC)
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The Women's Enterprise Organization of Canada (WEOC) was asked to offer insights on the national needs of women entrepreneurs by the Minister of Small Business and Tourism. WEOC engaged with its member organizations to generate this document which provides a summary of pertinent issues related to women's entrepreneurship and recommendations to support women's enterprise growth in Canada. The recommendations put forward draw from national and international reports, best practices, and the direct experience of WEOC's member organizations.

WEOC's position is that the women's entrepreneurship eco-system in Canada requires national coordination and strategic leadership and women entrepreneurs are poised to drive economic growth and job creation in Canada. However, while entrepreneurial activity and economic potential of women entrepreneurs is high in Canada, barriers to growth and success persist and women entrepreneurs face unique needs and challenges in starting and growing their businesses.

Women entrepreneurs are poised to drive economic growth and job creation in Canada

Canadian women are starting businesses at a greater rate than their male counterparts, accounting for the fastest-growing segment of the small-business sector. It is estimated that a 10% increase in the number of women-owned firms over the next decade could result in a net economic gain of \$15 billion, and a 20% increase in total revenues among women-owned businesses would add \$2 billion annually to the Canadian economy.

Targeted strategies are required to address the needs of and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs to enable inclusive economic growth

While entrepreneurial activity and economic potential of women entrepreneurs is high in Canada, barriers to growth and success persist. Women still make up a lower proportion of the population of entrepreneurs in Canada and women entrepreneurs are less likely to scale up their businesses despite expressing high growth intentions.

It is well documented that women entrepreneurs have unique needs and challenges in starting, developing, and growing their businesses. In particular, access to capital, access to markets, access to knowledge and networks, and addressing intrinsic and extrinsic biases are critical areas of focus.

These challenges are experienced by women across the country; however there is currently a lack of consistency in the services available to women entrepreneurs across Canada. There is a need for greater investment, coordination and strategic leadership to provide access to the support necessary to accelerate the impact and growth of women entrepreneurs in Canada.

WEOC is committed to working with government and partner organizations to mobilize key action strategies for women's enterprise growth

WEOC is invested in the success of women entrepreneurs across the country, and recognizes the importance of national coordination and strategic leadership to maximize the economic impact of women's entrepreneurship. By mobilising more than 20 years of collective expertise, knowledge and commitment, WEOC is well positioned to support the development and implementation of national strategies for women's enterprise growth.

WEOC has identified critical actions required to support a women's enterprise development strategy. These actions present opportunities for WEOC to work with government agencies to build on existing assets and mobilise future investments to foster inclusive economic growth and drive job creation in Canada.

- **Canada requires national leadership in supporting women's enterprise growth**
Canada would benefit from an intergovernmental working group on women in business to enable a strategic approach to investments in women's entrepreneurship. Canada requires an independent national organization to work with government to provide infrastructure and leadership for the operationalization of national strategies. WEOC has built a strong national foundation and is well positioned to operationalize a robust mandate to accelerate women's enterprise growth.
- **Canadian women entrepreneurs require consistent access to support services that address their unique needs and the challenges they face**
Regional disparities and inconsistencies in support services should be addressed through the establishment of independent women's enterprise support organizations funded by multi-year government contracts in each province. These organizations can join WEOC and contribute to greater coordination, strategic investment, and sharing of best practices. WEOC can leverage its expertise to help support or lead the development of women's enterprise organizations in provinces where there are gaps in service.
- **Canadian women entrepreneurs require a comprehensive national loan fund to increase access to capital**
Access to capital is critical at the foundational level to enable women to start and grow their businesses. With more than 20 years of collective expertise, WEOC can provide critical insights into the development of policies, protocols, and processes for a national loan fund. Further, WEOC's role in the women's entrepreneurship eco-system and national membership base bolsters its ability to work with government to manage a national loan fund.
- **Canadian women entrepreneurs require national knowledge, skill, and network building initiatives**

Knowledge sharing and skill building forums can serve as a vehicle to share best practices and scale women-owned businesses through a focus on growth-oriented topics such as supplier diversity, export markets, and managing business capital for growth. WEOC is willing and committed to support such national initiatives and lend its expertise and network with women entrepreneurs to ensure their success.

WEOC leadership is available to further discuss the contents and research informing the recommendation provided. These recommendations and an accompanying report document will be presented to representatives of the Ministry of Small Business and Tourism on May 4th, 2016, and will be shared with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and the Ministry of Status of Women Canada.

Key recommendations

WEOC has seven recommendations of how to move forward. Further information on the unique needs and challenges experienced by women entrepreneurs is provided in this report. WEOC leadership is available to further discuss the contents of this report and the recommendation provided. This document has been presented to representatives of the Ministry of Small Business and Tourism, the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the Ministry of Status of Women Canada and Global Affairs Canada.

1. Establish a women's enterprise support organization in each province that can join WEOC.
2. Address regional disparities and inconsistencies in access to support services for women entrepreneurs.
3. Ensure multi-year government funding contracts for support organizations.
4. Support a strong national organization that will work with government to provide infrastructure for the operationalization of national strategies to address the needs and challenges of women entrepreneurs.
5. Establish a comprehensive national loan fund for women entrepreneurs with consistent protocols and processes for national distribution of funds.
6. Establish national knowledge sharing initiatives including events with a mandate to connect women entrepreneurs from across the country.
7. Establish an intergovernmental working group on women in business.

WEOC is committed to supporting the growth and success of women entrepreneurs across Canada

Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) is the national association of professional business support organizations dedicated to the success of women entrepreneurs, and the authority on women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

Member organizations operate under federal and/or provincial mandates and provide an array of services including skills development in critical business management topics, connections to financing, and trade development opportunities. WEOC member organizations also facilitate peer-to-peer networking among business owners and mentoring through business community volunteers.

WEOC member organizations each have at least 20 years of service delivery experience to women entrepreneurs across Canada. Combined, the six founding member organizations have a network of more than 75,000 female business owners coast-to-coast, and the network continues to grow. Collectively, WEOC members have provided more than \$75 million in financing to women entrepreneurs who have in turn created or maintained over 6000 jobs with a cumulative economic impact of \$2 billion.

WEOC member organizations have developed internationally recognized best practice models of service delivery and programs for women entrepreneurs. Clients have achieved a 93% loan repayment rate, and 75% are in business after 5 years, exceeding the national average by 50%. WEOC recognizes that supporting women entrepreneurs requires more than access to financing. Women entrepreneurs require a coaching and mentoring approach that enables them to plan for and achieve growth outcomes.

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