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RESOURCES FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR

To support the growth of women starting and growing businesses, a robust ecosystem has been building itself out. Here are just some of the organizations that are available to you.

High-growth women entrepreneurs: Accelerators, boot camps and leadership training for women entrepreneurs include Dream it Athena, EY Entrepreneurial Winning, Merge Lane, Million Dollar Women Workshop, Springboard Enterprise and Women's Startup Lab (which just raised over \$1 million in a Series A financing round). Networking organizations and organizations that connect women entrepreneurs to investors include Astia, Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network (DWEN), The Vinetta Project and Women 2.0. Mackenzie Burnett of Distributed Systems put together this list of angel and early-stage tech investors.

Small to mid-sized companies: Networking groups include Chic CEO, Ellevate, the National Association of Women Business Owners, Savor the Success, She Owns It, SheWorx, The Boss Network, and Womancon. Educational support includes Hello Fearless, Rent the Runway Project Enterprise, Tory Burch Fellows Competition, Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and other organizations that certify women-owned businesses, Women Presidents' Organization (WPO), Women's Business Centers represent a national network of nearly 100 educational centers throughout the United States.

Federal small-business grants for women

The federal government offers some grants for small-business owners, but they're designated for very specific purposes, such as certain research and

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development projects or for businesses in rural areas. Government grants can't be used to cover startup costs or day-to-day expenses, and most aren't earmarked specifically for women.

1. Grants.gov

Grants.gov is a database of all federally sponsored grants. You can search for small-business grants here — just make sure you filter the results on the left side of the page to view grants specifically for small businesses.

2. InnovateHER Challenge

The U.S. Small Business Administration hosts an annual competition for businesses with a marketable product or service that positively affects women's lives. To participate, you must first enter and win a local InnovateHER Challenge to advance to the national semifinal round. The top three national finalists will win \$40,000, \$20,000 and \$10,000, respectively.

3. Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer programs

The SBA facilitates these two competitive programs, which ultimately provide grants to small businesses that contribute to federal research and development. Eleven federal agencies, including the departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Health and Human Services, post grant opportunities on their websites. You can search all grant opportunities on the SBIR website.

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State and local small-business grants.

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Because federal small-business grants are limited in number and often very competitive, you may have better luck looking for grants at the state and municipal levels. You'll have to do your own research to pinpoint specific grant programs in your area, but here are some places to look:

4. Women's Business Centers

The SBA sponsors about 100 Women's Business Centers nationwide, designed to help women entrepreneurs with business development and access to capital. Some, such as the California Capital Financial Development Corp., lend money directly, while others simply help you find small-business grants and loans that you may qualify for.

5. Economic development agencies

Every state and many cities have economic development agencies focused on promoting a strong local economy. Even if the agency itself doesn't offer a small-business grant, it will likely be able to point you in the right direction.

6. Small Business Development Centers

There are hundreds of these SBA-sponsored centers around the country, typically housed at colleges and universities. SBDCs offer free, one-on-one business consulting. Set up a meeting with your local SBDC advisor, who will be able to tell you about grants and other business financing opportunities in your area.

Private small-business grants for women.

Some private organizations and businesses have created national grant programs for women small-business owners. Here are two to look into:

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7. Amber Grant

The Amber Grant Foundation awards \$500 to a different women- owned business every month. At the end of each year, one of the 12 grant winners is awarded an additional \$2,000. The application is relatively simple: Explain what your business is, describe what you'd do with the grant money and pay a \$7 application fee. The foundation's advisory board chooses the winners, looking for women with passion and a good story.

8. Eileen Fisher Women-Owned Business Grant

Eileen Fisher, a women's clothing retailer, awards \$100,000 to up to 10 women business owners each year. To be eligible, women must make up at least 51% of your business's ownership and leadership, your business must have been in operation for at least three years, it must not exceed \$1 million in annual revenue, and it must be focused on environmental or social change.

Two other good possibilities for grants.

These options aren't specifically for women, but they're good small- business grants to consider:

9. FedEx Small Business Grant

FedEx awards up to \$25,000 apiece to 10 small businesses annually. The application requires an explanation of your business, how you'd use the money, photos of your business and — this part is optional — a short video explaining your business. You don't need a FedEx account to apply.

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10. Mission Main Street Grants

Chase Bank gives \$150,000 to 20 small businesses each year through its Mission Main Street Grants program. To be eligible, you must have been in business at least two years and have fewer than 100 employees, and the application includes answering five essay questions.

More: Find small-business grants for minorities Angels and Venture Capitalist Opportunities.

Female Funders aims to activate 1000 female accredited investors to make their first angel investment.

Plum Alley Investments offers male and female accredited investors a way to invest in outstanding companies led by women entrepreneurs and gender diverse teams.

Radical Generosity from SheEO started in Canada and will roll out to several cities throughout the U.S. in 2016. One thousand women in a city contribute \$1,000 each to raise \$1 million per fund, which will be provided as interest free loans to 10 women-led companies.

The Mel Rines '47 Student Angel Investment Fund teaches female undergraduates at the University of New Hampshire how to manage an investment fund.

The Rising Tide Fund uses a “learn-by-doing” model. Accredited female investors make small stake investments in companies raising money via Portfolia, a crowdfunding platform for consumer products.



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Other training organizations include 37 Angels, Pipeline Angles (now in 21 cities) and Women First from Angel Resource Institute. The rise in the number of women angels is great for early stage women-led companies, but it is venture firms that will provide growth capital, said Amoils. As the hiring of Joanna Drake Earl demonstrates, angels are a source for VC partners.