



# INVEST IN WOMEN FOUNDERS

2025 SUMMIT



November 13 | Noon-6pm  
Indianapolis, Indiana

## 2025 Applicant Criteria for the Top 9

The Startup Ladies Board, Ambassadors, and staff are delighted to welcome women and nonbinary founders from around the US to apply to be in our Top 9 for our 4th annual **#InvestInWomenFounders Summit** on Thursday, November 13, 2025 from noon-6pm at the Skyline Club in Indianapolis.

### Lessons Learned

From our conversations with past founders, we've learned how important it is to be open and clear about who we're seeking and what we hope to achieve together. This guide is meant to give you insight into the heart of our summit –our “why -- and to show you exactly how we'll identify, support, and connect the Top 9 founders. We hope it inspires confidence and excitement as you prepare to join this journey.

### This is NOT a Competition

The **#InvestInWomenFounders Summit** is a celebration and convening of founders, funders, and corporate executives with the goal of helping women founders secure investment to grow. Participants and attendees will also have the opportunity to expand their network and meet prospective clients, investors, advisors, and friends.

### Values Alignment

Our community is diverse, inclusive, and LGBTQ+ affirming. We know how hard it is to be a woman founder - particularly a female founder of color and/or being queer. The market has proven that obstacles are far more staggering and frequent for female founders. Our team of executive professionals understands this. We require that all participants treat one another with respect, professionalism, and an openness to learn from each other.

### Goals Alignment

Your success depends on how you show up. Investment is not guaranteed. If you show up consistently, be open to feedback, do the homework, and practice, practice, practice, you are very likely to...

- Improve your communication skills
- Improve your presentation skills
- Become more confident
- Refine your slide deck

- Expand your network
- Meet prospective clients
- Connect in meaningful ways with prospective investors
- Become a part of a community focused on increasing success of women founders

### **Top 9 Benefits**

- Access to The Startup Ladies investor network
- Training from senior level executives and exited founders
- Be interviewed by a senior executive or exited founder in front of a room full of investors
- One on one mentoring
- 1 ticket to the #InvestInWomenFounders Summit (valued at \$250)
- Exposure via social media, newsletters, and media
- Deck feature in our Members Portal
- Community of people who are supporting you and your business
- Display table (valued at \$2,500)
- **#InvestInWomenFounders Summit Certification** from The Startup Ladies

### **Founder Cost = \$0**

Thanks to the sponsorship of several companies and the generosity of dozens of senior executives, business owners, and exited founders, there is zero cost for the Top 9 finalists.

### **Startups are Encouraged to Apply**

Kudos to you if you've won a pitch competition and/or raised money from friends or family! You should apply! We also encourage founders who have NOT yet raised money to apply if they have done the following:

- Understand the problem that needs to be solved
- Can explain the problem that needs to be solved
- Can prove people have the problem
- Can prove there is a group of people who want to pay for your solution
- Completed surveys that validate and invalidate your assumptions about the problem
- Completed customer interviews
- Can identify competition
- Know how to differentiate yourself from competitors
- Defined the first version of the solution you will sell to customers
- Have a non-functional or working prototype
- Can explain in one sentence what you are selling
- Need to take on investment in order to scale

—> We are searching for well thought out concepts for businesses owned by women who are committed to growing their companies. If you came up with an idea over the weekend at a party, you're not ready to be in the Top 9. However, you can join us at Startup Study Hall and get ready!

### **Scaleups are Encouraged to Apply**

Kudos to you if you've closed a formal round of funding from angels and VCs! If you are a female founder or co-founder and have an equity stake in the company, apply!

## **The Startup Ladies are Industry Agnostic**

We don't care what industry you are in. Doesn't matter if you are a product or service company. We're looking for business models that are scalable. All of them will be tech enabled.

## **Women Founders from ANY State are Welcome to Apply!**

All of the training will take place in Indianapolis, Indiana. However, we know that smart and talented women founders live all over the US. If you are selected, we can make a plan to have you participate in the training sessions via Zoom. However, **you must attend the Summit in person on 11/13.**

## **Applications are Open to The Public**

You do not need to be a current member of The Startup Ladies to apply to be in our Top 9.

## **Previous Top 9 Candidates May Apply if...**

- You are a current member of The Startup Ladies
- Received a positive evaluation from your Summit Interviewer & Trainers

## **Evaluation Process and Judging Criteria**

A diverse sub committee of The Startup Ladies Board will be reviewing and evaluating all applications. Below is a set of criteria the judges will be using to rank applicants and select the Top 9.

- [Woman owned?](#)
- Does the founder have a proven track record of success in her career?
- Is the founder an expert in her industry?
- Problem defined clearly?
- Solution defined clearly?
- Is the concept scalable?
- Is the market defined clearly?
- Already raised money?
- Generating revenue?
- Is the company making a social impact?

## **Attendance is MANDATORY at ALL Training**

If you live in Indiana, your physical presence will be required at all IN PERSON training sessions. Out of state candidates will have the opportunity to participate in training sessions via Zoom.

## **🌟 2025 TRAINING SCHEDULE**

- Friday, 9/26 | 2–4 p.m. ET | Zoom | Orientation
- Thursday, 10/2 | 2–4 p.m. ET | Zoom | Training 1
- Wednesday, 10/8 | 4–7 p.m. ET | In person | Training 2
- Wednesday, 10/22 | 4–7 p.m. ET | Zoom | Training 3
- Wednesday, 10/29 | 4–7 p.m. ET | Zoom | Training 4
- Wednesday, 11/5 | 4–7 p.m. ET | TBD | Training 5
- Thursday, 11/13 | 10 a.m.–6 p.m. ET | Skyline Club | 2025 #InvestInWomenFounders Summit

—> **ALL TOP 9** candidates must attend the #InvestInWomenFounders Summit on **11/13 in person.**

There will be no option to connect via Zoom on 11/13. You need to be there to connect with everyone!

## **Missing Practice = Forfeiture of Top 9 Candidacy at the Summit**

We take commitment very seriously. It's a great indicator of competence and reliability in a CEO. If you cannot attend 100% of the aforementioned training dates, please do not apply. If you miss a practice, you will forfeit your spot in the Top 9.

## **Preparation Between Training Sessions**

Our trainers will provide assignments to be completed outside of training sessions. These assignments will not only prepare founders for the Summit, they will help them far beyond the big event to grow and secure investment. We expect all assignments to be completed and submitted on time. First-time entrepreneurs and very early stage startups should plan to spend 2-4 hours after each training on the assignments. Later stage startups and more sophisticated founders should plan to spend about 1-2 hours on assignments.

## **Executive Presence is Expected**

- Show up on time - be in your seat ready to learn before the start time.
- Meet every due date.
- Be prepared for each practice.
- Practice outside of training.
- Support your fellow founders with positive conversation at every event/training.
- If you're in a room with a human - talk with them - the phone belongs in your purse.
- Thank everyone who helps to move you forward - repeatedly.
- Be coachable - feedback will help you improve.
- Bring business cards to every training and event.
- Even when you have a bad day, you must be kind and considerate to everyone.
- No excuses - the buck stops with the CEO. We want to see what you're made of.

## **Summit Agenda**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>10:00 am</b> | Vendors arrive to set up their tables (tables MUST BE SET by 11am)                          |
| <b>11:30 am</b> | Group & interview pair photos   |
| <b>11:45 am</b> | Top 9 heads to their display tables to chat with attendees who visit                        |
| <b>Noon</b>     | Guests arrive, check in, go to assigned table, visit with founders at tables & buffet lunch |
| <b>12:25 pm</b> | Top 9 goes from display tables to assigned lunch table for buffet lunch                     |
| <b>12:30 pm</b> | Formal welcome (10 minutes)   |
| <b>12:40 pm</b> | Table conversations   |
| <b>1:10 pm</b>  | Thanks sponsors and introduce panelists   |
| <b>1:15 pm</b>  | Panel discussion with past Top 9 success stories  |
| <b>1:45 pm</b>  | Instructions to move to the first session   |
| <b>1:50 pm</b>  | Everyone moves into their session   |
| <b>2:00 pm</b>  | Fund the founder! Session 1 (3 rooms)   |
| <b>2:45 pm</b>  | Break   |
| <b>3:00 pm</b>  | Fund the founder! Session 2 (3 rooms)   |
| <b>3:45 pm</b>  | Break   |
| <b>4:00 pm</b>  | Fund the founder! Session 3 (3 rooms)   |
| <b>4:45 pm</b>  | Break   |
| <b>5:00 pm</b>  | Cocktail reception  |
| <b>6:00 pm</b>  | Wrap up   |

## Application Due Date

**Monday, September 15 at 11:59pm ET**

### Top 9 Selection Date

The Top 9 candidates will be selected and contacted by one of the selection committee members no later than **Monday, September 22, 2025**.

### Top 9 Confirmation Date

Top 9 candidates must confirm their participation with the selection committee member via email no later than **Wednesday, September 24, 2025**.

### Top 9 Public Announcement

The 2025 Top 9 candidates will be announced in early October via press release and on social media.

### Nonprofits are NOT Eligible to Apply

Nonprofits are a very important part of our community and are welcome to purchase tickets and attend the summit. The Top 9 selection is specifically focused on women founders who are building **for-profit** scalable companies that will take on investment and sell at some point in the future.

### Risk is Rewarded!

This guide was meant to communicate the high caliber of women entrepreneurs we are expecting to apply and support. If you're still reading this, there's a pretty good chance that you or someone you know should apply. Give it a shot - you have nothing to lose - and it takes only minutes. Good luck!

## APPLICATION LINK

—> [CLICK HERE](#) to apply.

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### Still Have Questions?

If you still have questions that we haven't answered here, you may do one of the following:

1. **EMAIL:** please address your note to the “**2025 Summit Selection Committee**.”  
Please be sure to introduce yourself and your company, and send your questions to:  
[Info@TheStartupLadies.org](mailto:Info@TheStartupLadies.org)
2. **Q & A Session:** [CLICK HERE](#) to register for our Q&A with CEO & Founder of The Startup Ladies, Kristen Cooper to have your questions answered about the application process, training, and Summit on Friday, September 12 from 9am-10am ET.