

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC VENTURES 2026 SUMMER SERVICE PROJECT ERIC FENG

THE ORGANIZATION

Women's Economic Ventures (WEV) is a nonprofit dedicated to empowering women to achieve economic independence through entrepreneurship. WEV provides business training, one on one advising, and access to capital to help women launch and scale small businesses. Its programs strengthen financial literacy, business planning, and long term financial management, while its microloan offerings address critical funding gaps. Through this integrated approach, WEV promotes economic mobility and helps women build sustainable businesses that strengthen their families and communities.



THE ISSUE

Women entrepreneurs receive only a small fraction of business funding and face persistent gaps in financial resources and training. Women-led startups receive about 2 percent of all venture capital funding, and only around 4 percent of small business loans go to women-owned firms. But the barrier is not only capital. WEV's own client data showed that 85 percent of graduates took a concrete savings action after its Financial Empowerment course, yet clients consistently described stalling once they were on their own. The gap was not knowledge. It was structure, accountability, and someone expecting them to follow through.

THE LOCATION

WEV serves entrepreneurs across California's Central Coast, primarily Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. Despite the region's overall affluence, high living costs and income inequality create significant barriers to small business ownership, particularly for first generation entrepreneurs and women of color. Language access matters here as much as capital access: 68 percent of the clients who responded to my survey answered in Spanish, and every one of them named Spanish-language coaching as what would make participation possible.



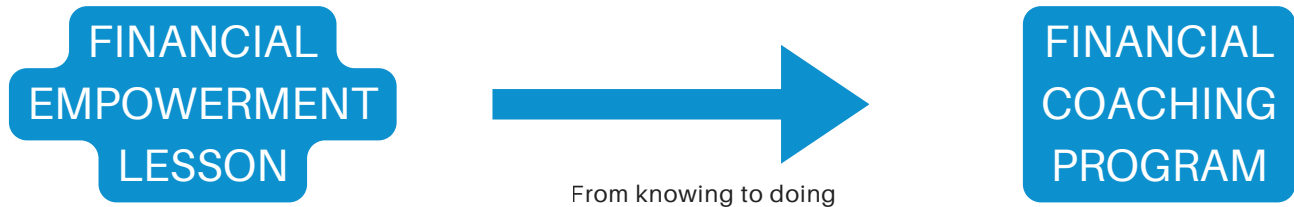
THE PROJECT

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT?

This summer I designed the WEV Financial Coaching Program, a structured second stage that extends beyond the free Financial Empowerment course to provide implementation support and accountability. Based in person at WEV's Santa Barbara office, I built the program from client evidence rather than assumption:

- Analyzed 455 archived client responses and benchmarked comparable coaching programs across nonprofit and private tiers
- Designed and fielded a bilingual needs-assessment survey, drawing 25 responses, 68 percent in Spanish
- Sat in on Financial Empowerment classes and visited client businesses across the region
- Interviewed three WEV coaches and seven clients in English and Spanish

The resulting model specifies eligibility, session structure, pricing, delivery, and coach hiring standards, and was built inside WEV's existing infrastructure so staff could adopt it without new systems. WEV received a full written analysis, a reusable bilingual survey instrument, interview protocols, a measurement framework benchmarked against 160 prior graduates, and 21 clients already opted in to form the first cohort.



ERIC'S CONNECTION

I chose this project because it is deeply personal to me. Growing up, I watched my mom dream of starting her own business in China, but she lacked access to capital, mentorship, and supportive networks. Entrepreneurship was often discouraged for women, and without the right resources, her vision never became reality. In high school, I founded Educated Finance, a financial literacy initiative that has impacted over 3,500 individuals. Through this work, I saw how access to practical financial tools can transform confidence and opportunity. Partnering with Women's Economic Ventures let me apply that experience while learning directly from women entrepreneurs, supporting others who faced barriers similar to those my mom once did.

