



Each of the Executive Summit sessions are intended to be strategic and forward-looking. To help ground the conversations we've prepared the following SWOT analyses. They highlight Canada's foundational strengths, the opportunities created by geopolitical and technological shifts, the structural weaknesses we must confront, and the risks of incrementalism. The points below are not intended to be exhaustive.

Together, though, they frame the hard calls required to build the next economy.

TIME: 9:15 - 10:00 AM

GOING "ALL IN" ON CANADA'S ECONOMY (SESSION 1)

STRENGTHS

- Canada has strong foundations across multiple strategic domains, including AI research, energy resources, and defence/space capabilities.
- Demonstrated capacity to act decisively when the stakes are urgent and clear (e.g. COVID response).
- Growing alignment among industry and post-secondary leaders on the need for speed, scale, and coordination; clear ambitions already articulated by PSI and industry leaders, including quantitative targets for AI adoption and productivity gains.
- Existing skilled talent and the ability to train new talent, if mobilized effectively.
- A shared sense of urgency.

WEAKNESSES

- Weak starting position, including lower business AI adoption rates than OECD peers, brain drain of STEM graduates, and skills shortages in key nation-building sectors.
- Fragmented systems, where research, skills, and innovation are treated as separate files despite nation-building industries needing all three.
- Structural bottlenecks (such as procurement timelines, immigration pathways, skills mobility) as well as cultural bottlenecks (such as high risk aversion and preference for incremental changes).
- Weak productivity growth, despite significant past investments.
- Slow translation of our advantages into outcomes, compared to peer countries.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Convergence of forces (e.g. AI, energy transition, geopolitics) creating a rare window for coordinated action.
- Clear signals from industry and post-secondary that they are ready to move faster and take more risks.
- Ability to learn from past missteps.
- Nation-building frames of security, sovereignty, and resilience resonate politically and publicly.
- Potential to scale what already works, rather than constantly launching new pilots.

THREATS

- Global competitors moving faster, locking in advantage while Canada deliberates.
- Demographic pressure, with retirements outpacing workforce renewal.
- Erosion of public confidence, if ambition continues to outstrip results.
- Policy churn, where priorities shift before systems can adapt.
- Missing this window of opportunity through insufficient action and watching this inflection point turn into more lost opportunities.



TIME: 10:00 - 10:45 AM

POWERING CANADA'S NEXT ECONOMY (SESSION 2)

STRENGTHS

- Canada has a diverse energy portfolio spanning hydro, nuclear, gas, renewables, etc.
- Recognized expertise in nuclear operations, refurbishment, and safety, including on-time, on-budget delivery of complex projects.
- World-class clean electricity generation capacity, anchored by hydro, is a foundational competitive advantage in the global energy transition.
- Globally-respected post-secondary systems as the infrastructure for training, applied research, and discovery research.
- Strong federal government commitment, through the Major Projects Office (MPO), to position Canada as a global energy superpower.

WEAKNESSES

- Severe workforce shortages across all levels (trades, engineers, ICT, project managers, etc.), exacerbated by retirements and pandemic-era attrition.
- Availability gaps in higher education programs in fields like nuclear, critical minerals, emerging energy technologies, and energy trades apprenticeships.
- Limited ability to scale academic programs quickly despite strong demand with our higher education sector under strain.
- Insufficient industry-PSI collaboration pathways.
- Fragmented regulatory and permitting processes and lack of binding timelines.
- Incohesive supply chain and limited domestic manufacturing depth often makes Canada a “buyer” rather than “builder” of critical energy infrastructure inputs.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Building with Indigenous communities from the ground up, including equity stakes in major projects.
- Growing energy demand from data centres to create a strong market.
- Strengthening industry-PSI partnerships through targeted certificate programs; applied research partnerships with industry adoption; and joint investment into discovery research.
- Creating new models of workforce development in collaboration.
- A Canada First policy to support local procurement, and tactics that scale production, reduce costs, and increase domestic manufacturing.
- Developing a coordinated national energy infrastructure “heat map” to align project sequencing, regional strengths, labour needs, and supply chain capacity.

THREATS

- Tariffs and geopolitical tensions limiting trade and causing supply chain volatility.
- America outcompeting Canada for capital and supply chain investment.
- Structural underfunding of mid-sized manufacturers, limiting domestic capacity expansion.
- China accounts for a third of global energy investment and 70% control of the global mining of rare earth elements.
- Increased international competition for energy talent, combined with skilled talent shortages at home.
- Competing priorities between traditional energy and renewables.



TIME: 11:45 - 12:30 PM

MISSION READY: BUILDING CANADA'S DEFENCE TALENT PIPELINE (SESSION 4)

STRENGTHS

- Globally strong research reputation and trusted national public institutions.
- Existing network of defence research centres (DRDC labs).
- Dual-use technology capabilities for quantum computing, biosecurity, manufacturing, cybersecurity, and more.
- The talent, capability, and interest exist in Canada: they just need to be enabled.

WEAKNESSES

- Commercialization roadblocks and limited government coordination on space and defence.
- Critical recruitment and retention shortfalls: attrition rates have increased year on year, with over 5,000 military personnel leaving in 2024-2025.
- Procurement framework and risk tolerance are weak compared to peer countries and hinders our defence industry from capitalizing on opportunities.
- Limited post-secondary + defence industry collaboration pathways.

OPPORTUNITIES

- New NATO defence spending goals mean historic increases in investment, creating demand and momentum.
- The BOREALIS project to create a DARPA-style high risk, high reward innovation engine that serves both military and dual-use tech needs.
- Upwards trend of increasing private equity and venture capital investment in aerospace and defence.
- Building deeper partnerships with PSIs for credentialing, skills training, and applied research.

THREATS

- Global competition for technical talent, including cybersecurity, aerospace, AI, and engineering.
- International allies and competitors provide faster and larger grants to their defence industries. E.g. US DoD invests \$1.6B in university defence research; \$240M Australia Defence Trailblazer initiative strengthens collaboration between defence industry and academia.
- Inter-departmental and procurement inefficiencies risk slowing adoption.
- Arctic sovereignty challenges from competing nations.
- Lack of public understanding of defence career paths, affecting recruitment and retention.



TIME: 1:30 - 2:15 PM

DUAL-USE FRONTIERS: TURNING UNIVERSITY IDEAS INTO SECURITY AND GROWTH (SESSION 5)

STRENGTHS

- World-class advanced research across fields like space, life sciences, and AI, with clear civilian and security applications.
- Trusted public research institutions, enabling work in sensitive or regulated domains.
- Growing public recognition of dual-use value, particularly as defence, health, climate, and security priorities converge.
- Emerging funding interest, including increased attention to defence and security-related research.
- Existing talent base of highly trained researchers and graduate students with transferable skills.

WEAKNESSES

- Unclear or fragmented IP pathways, making it difficult to move discoveries from institutions into firms at speed.
- Limited incentives for commercialization of security-relevant research, especially when markets are uncertain or regulated.
- Cultural and organizational gaps between academic research timelines and operational or market needs.
- Procurement and funding systems not designed for experimentation, slowing transition from proof-of-concept to deployment.
- Low talent mobility between universities, startups, and mission-oriented firms.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Rising public spending on defence and security creates space for dual-use research to scale.
- Mission-driven models in other countries that link research funding to real-world outcomes show promising results.
- Dual-use applications can be tailored for Canadian needs in space systems, biosecurity, health, data, safety, and more.
- Opportunities to create new partnership models that enable universities to work more directly with firms and public agencies.
- Room to create new talent circulation pathways, allowing researchers to move fluidly between labs, firms, and public missions.

THREATS

- Loss of value capture, as Canadian discoveries are commercialized or scaled outside of the country.
- Global competition for dual-use leadership, with allies investing more aggressively in translation and deployment.
- Regulatory uncertainty, particularly where civilian and security uses overlap.
- Risk aversion within institutions, discouraging engagement in sensitive or non-traditional commercialization pathways.
- Missing the strategic window of this moment, if funding increases outpace Canada's ability to translate research quickly.



TIME: 2:15 - 3:00 PM

GOING “ALL IN” ON SPACE: TALENT, IDEAS, AND CANADA’S NEXT FRONTIER (SESSION 6)

STRENGTHS

- World-class space industry with expertise in niche areas.
- Research-intensive universities producing world-class talent and research.
- Internationally regarded as a reliable space-faring partner.
- Highly educated population, and national R&D leadership in certain areas (energy, quantum computing, AI).

WEAKNESSES

- Decentralized, confusing, and outdated government roles in space policy, procurement and regulations.
- Weak innovation culture and worsening national productivity.
- Low government expenditures in space cf. most space-faring nations.
- Public perceptions of space investments as of lower priority than pressing societal needs.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Space infrastructure has become key to national priorities (healthcare, sovereignty, security and prosperity).
- Government is allocating billions to raise annual defence spending and billions more for national infrastructure projects.
- Global space economy is expected to triple to US\$ 1.8 trillion by 2035.
- Global space-faring partners have ambitions to explore deep space and are advancing the enabling technologies.

THREATS

- Rupturing of the old-world order has impaired our long-standing partnerships with the US.
- Post-secondary institutions in Canada are scaling down and restructuring amid reduced revenues.
- The number of space-faring nations and competitive industries with significant budgets is growing.
- Competitor nations are investing in skills and infrastructure, as a means of securing preeminent roles in space exploration.



TIME: 3:15 - 4:00 PM

GOING ALL IN ON AI: FROM EXPERIMENTS TO ENTERPRISE-WIDE IMPACT (SESSION 7)

STRENGTHS

- World-leading AI research base, with 10% of global top-tier AI researchers.
- Strong public trust in institutions to lead and make decisions.
- \$4.4B of federal funding since 2016, including \$2.4B federal investment in AI compute over 2024-2029.
- Growing ecosystem of AI firms and platforms, including enterprise-focused Canadian companies (670+ startups and \$15.3B in private investment since 2013).
- Early corporate organizations leading by example to demonstrate that scaled AI deployment can deliver significant productivity gains.
- Strong post-secondary system capable of supporting AI skills development and applied research.

WEAKNESSES

- Low enterprise AI adoption, with the vast majority of Canadian organizations still in pilot mode at best or not even considering adoption at worst.
- Low AI commercialization and patent retention: only 3% of global AI market share, while 75% of AI patents developed in Canada are owned by foreign entities.
- AI literacy and skills gaps—ranking 45th-50th out of OECD countries.
- Severe compute deficit compared to G7 per capita average.
- Brain drain: nearly a quarter of STEM grads from top universities leave Canada.
- Limited pathways for industry + academic collaboration.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Investment to close infrastructure and resource gaps.
- Radically redesign PSE programs for a world with AI (e.g. industry co-developed curricula, required work-integrated learning, research commercialization pathways).
- Bridge academia and industry through partnerships.
- Public sector leadership can use procurement and deployment to accelerate development and adoption of AI tools.
- Dual use research and commercialization from defence spending.

THREATS

- Accelerating workforce exodus to the US combined with lack of experienced talent is a major rate limiter for growth.
- AI replacing entry-level roles across many sectors of the economy, not just tech or business.
- Under-investment in AI upskilling for mid-career professionals.
- Global competition intensifying: Canada produced 0 of the top 40 AI models in 2024.
- Culture of risk aversion, lack of enterprise support to take businesses from start-ups to big firms, and much lower private capital investment compared to other countries.
- Environmental concerns and the energy and climate challenges of data centres.



TIME: 4:00 - 4:45 PM

THE POLITICS OF GOING ALL IN: MAKING BIG BETS ON RESEARCH, SKILLS, POST-SECONDARY, AND GROWTH (SESSION 8)

STRENGTHS

- Strong historical precedent for large-scale public investments, with rich data for successes and lessons learned.
- Broad rhetorical support for productivity, growth, and competitiveness across all parties.
- Deep expertise within government, including experienced public servants and advisors who understand long-term effects and trade-offs.
- Established national institutions, including post-secondary systems capable of absorbing and deploying investment at scale.
- Public concern about economic performance, creating political space and appetite for new solutions.

WEAKNESSES

- Mixed results from past “big bets”, weakening political and public confidence in returns on investment.
- Post-secondary funding models that often reward volume over impact, and homogenization over differentiation.
- Short electoral cycles, which work against long-term investments with delayed payoffs.
- Fragmented accountability across jurisdictions and departments, making it difficult to measure and demonstrate clear impact.
- Erosion of public trust, including skepticism about whether investments benefit everyday Canadians.
- Perception that post-secondary and innovation systems have not delivered on their economic promise, contributing to the sense that the social contract between higher education and the public has weakened.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Heightened geopolitical, national security, and economic pressures can justify bolder public action.
- Clearer evidence emerging on what works both at home and around the world (e.g. mission-driven funding, differentiation, talent-aligned systems).
- Growing recognition that productivity, skills, and research are interconnected, not siloed issues.
- Potential for new federal-provincial-territorial collaborations to align their roles in skills, research, and workforce development.
- Coalitions beyond government (business, institutions, community) that can help dilute political risk.

THREATS

- Political culture of risk aversion, especially after previous initiatives that have failed to show results.
- Fiscal constraints and competing priorities (e.g. defence, healthcare, infrastructure) limiting room for discretionary investment.
- Public backlash against the elitism of post-secondary and research institutions.
- Misalignment of goals and/or execution among different levels and departments of government.
- Policy churn, where strategies change faster than systems can adapt.
- Risk that Canada settles for incrementalism, missing the window for transformative change.