

2025



ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL

ZONTA WOMEN IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD

Expanding opportunities
for women in business



The Zonta Women in Business Leadership Award acknowledges and celebrates women who demonstrate exceptional leadership, entrepreneurial spirit, ethical conduct and make significant contributions to their respective industries while addressing global or local issues affecting women and girls or climate justice.

Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awards are made possible by generous contributions to the Zonta Foundation for Women Rose Fund from Zonta members, Zonta clubs and friends of Zonta.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Casey McDermott



District 1

Citizenship: Canada

Pursuing Master of Business Administration at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Casey McDermott has more than a decade of experience from her work within humanitarian aid, emergency response and international development. She is a purpose-driven leader known for building resilient systems in complex, high-stakes environments. She currently serves as head of risk management at the Canadian Red Cross, where she works to strengthen governance, enable strategy and embed risk-informed decision-making in support of humanitarian outcomes in Canada and abroad.

Casey has held leadership roles with globally recognized organizations, including the United Nations, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross and CARE. Her extensive international experience brings a global perspective shaped by collaboration across cultures, disciplines and sectors.

A strong advocate for women's leadership and the importance of mentorship, Casey is committed to fostering inclusive environments and supporting emerging leaders as they navigate and grow in their fields. Her leadership approach blends analytical rigor with empathy, curiosity and a belief that sustainable impact is achieved through both strong systems and strong relationships.

Casey is currently completing an Executive Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Oxford, where she looks to bridge humanitarian values with business and strategic leadership. As a mom and connector at heart, Casey is driven by purpose, to build inclusive systems, drive impact and leave every space a bit better than she found it.

In Casey's free time, Casey enjoys sailing, reading and spending time with her family by the ocean in her home province of Nova Scotia, Canada.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Mikaela Morelli



District 4

Citizenship: Canada

Co-founder and chief executive officer of ReFem Technologies and product management associate at Cosm Medical, Canada

Mikaela Morelli has more than five years of experience in the fields of healthcare, life sciences and medical technology. Her career includes managing multimillion-dollar healthcare projects, driving process improvements in pharmaceutical operations and shaping business and product strategy in startups. She also serves on multiple boards, championing equity in STEM and creating opportunities for emerging women leaders.

Mikaela noticed women's health has long been under researched and underfunded, resulting in outdated tools, overlooked pain and minimal innovation. Her own healthcare journey revealed these gaps and fueled her determination to design solutions that improve outcomes and elevate women's voices in medical innovation. This path led her through McMaster University's Master of Biomedical Innovation program and into entrepreneurship.

Mikaela serves as co-founder and CEO of ReFem Technologies, a startup redefining women's healthcare through patient-centered innovation. Through its flagship product in reproductive care, ReFem addresses the long-standing underinvestment in women's health by replacing outdated practices with solutions that prioritize integrity, community and vision. She also serves as a product management associate at Cosm Medical, where she leads the development and commercialization of personalized pelvic health solutions.

Mikaela has been recognized with multiple awards and grants and continues to contribute to organizations advancing health, innovation and equity, such as the Medical Innovation & Global Health Association.

Outside of work, Mikaela enjoys reading, fitness, painting, traveling and discovering new coffee shops and restaurants.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Dani Wasia



District 8

Citizenship: United States

Pursuing Master of Science in organization development at Pepperdine Graziadio Business School, USA

Dani Wasia has pursued a single mission throughout her career: building systems that serve people—especially women—more effectively and equitably. As a consultant with AG Consulting Partners, she works with Microsoft to design operations and change management strategies that make large, complex systems feel more human.

Dani is an active leader in the Pacific Northwest entrepreneurial community. For the past three years, she has facilitated Kitsap County's Matchstick Lab Micro Business Accelerator, supporting local entrepreneurs as they turn ideas into sustainable businesses. More than 80% of participants in the program have been women. She also founded Daley Collaborations, where she leads leadership training programs, entrepreneurship development initiatives and strategic operations projects for organizations such as the Aspen Institute and the Montana Racial Equity Project.

Dani is now pursuing a Master of Science in organization development at Pepperdine University. She is focused on advancing structural change through equity-centered design. Her work aims to empower leaders across sectors to make decisions grounded in an ethic of care and to help mission-driven organizations in the western United States integrate sustainability, equity and care into their core systems.

Outside of work and academics, Dani can be found mountain biking, motorcycling or buying art at the local farmer's market.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Jeannine Coelho



District 15

Citizenship: Pakistan

Pursuing Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Science (MS) in environment and sustainability at the University of Michigan, USA

Holds Bachelor of Science in biological sciences from Imperial College London, United Kingdom

Jeannine Coelho is a sustainability professional pursuing a dual MBA and MS in environment and sustainability through the Erb Institute at the University of Michigan. Currently in her first year, she is focusing on building financial and business acumen through an environmental lens to advance scalable climate solutions. Her future goals include becoming a climate strategy leader, mobilizing private capital, designing bankable decarbonization projects and aligning financial incentives with real-world climate outcomes.

Prior to graduate school, Jeannine worked as an environment, social and governance (ESG) consultant at a climate advisory firm, where she supported corporates and financial institutions on their ESG strategy, decarbonization roadmap and greenhouse gas accounting. She has also contributed to projects on carbon markets, nature-based solutions and climate finance, co-authoring a Gates Foundation-funded paper that analyzed Pakistan's carbon credit landscape.

Jeannine's professional journey was shaped by growing up in Pakistan, where she experienced firsthand the acute impacts of climate change. While serving as a fund manager for a philanthropic foundation, she witnessed the compounding pressures these climate catastrophes placed on local communities, particularly farmers, many of whom were women, who faced the loss of livelihoods and economic insecurity.

Jeannine holds a Bachelor of Science in biological sciences from Imperial College London and co-founded Sukoon Care Technologies, a digital cardiac rehabilitation startup that secured international funding and research partnerships.

In her free time, Jeannine enjoys being outdoors, trying different cuisines and playing with her dogs, Dew and Olive.



2025 Zonta Women in Business
Leadership Awardee

Jewel Wing Shum Ho



District 17

Citizenship: Hong Kong

Solutions Architect at Meta Platforms Inc., Hong Kong

Jewel Wing Shum Ho is a technology leader and advocate for inclusive innovation. Leveraging her background in development economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and engineering science from the University of Toronto, she integrates technological expertise to support early-stage startups.

Jewel is currently a solutions architect at Meta Platforms Inc., with prior roles at Nasdaq and Bloomberg. She has spearheaded scalable technology solutions in MarTech, Fintech and Greentech. Her professional journey reflects a commitment to advancing technology that drives both business value and positive social change.

Beyond her corporate career, Jewel is a leader in advancing women's empowerment in technology. Since 2018, she has led the Hong Kong and Macau chapter of She Loves Tech, the world's largest startup competition and accelerator platform for women in technology. Under her leadership, the chapter has grown into a regional powerhouse, supporting founders through mentorship, investment education and visibility. Her current initiative, Confidence in Tech, further accelerates early-stage startups by equipping them with tools to overcome visibility barriers. These programs not only support founders but also inspire women across industries to transition into technology careers.

In her free time, Jewel is a sports enthusiast. Whether she's exploring new running routes, sailing or watching sports games, she finds joy and resilience through sport.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Vanessa Asomah



District 18

Citizenship: Ghana

Faculty intern at Ashesi University, Ghana

Vanessa Asomah is a Ghanaian business graduate, emerging finance professional and social entrepreneur committed to advancing inclusive and ethical financial systems in Africa. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration with concentrations in finance and entrepreneurship from Ashesi University, where she developed a strong foundation in financial analysis, leadership and innovation.

Vanessa's passion for inclusive finance is deeply rooted in her lived experience. Growing up in Ghana, she witnessed firsthand how financial exclusion limits women-led small and medium-sized enterprises. These experiences shaped her long-term mission to design solutions that expand access to capital, financial literacy and opportunity for underserved entrepreneurs, particularly women operating in the informal sector.

At Ashesi University, Vanessa demonstrated strong leadership across academic and co-curricular spaces. She served as finance lead of the Ashesi Investment Society, connecting students with finance professionals and organizing workshops that demystified investing. She also held leadership roles within the research club, contributing to the organization of Ashesi's first research festival. Beyond campus, Vanessa served as chief executive officer and manager of a campus minimart, where she led pricing, inventory and customer engagement strategies that increased annual revenue by 30%.

Vanessa has interned with Databank in the research department and worked with Ignite Ventures, where she supported the identification and evaluation of early-stage African startups. Alongside her professional work, she founded Her Next Steps, a mentorship platform that supports young Ghanaian girls in navigating higher education and scholarship opportunities.

Vanessa's long-term goal is to pursue graduate education and build an AI-powered financial advisory and credit-scoring tool tailored to informal businesses in Africa, enabling women entrepreneurs to access credit and make informed financial decisions.

In her free time, Vanessa enjoys reading, mentoring young women, journaling, exploring emerging technologies and engaging in creative reflection through writing and quiet walks.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Faisa Abukar Abdi



District 21

Citizenship: Somalia and Sweden

Chief executive officer at QC Renewable Energy, Sweden

Faisa Abukar Abdi was born in Mogadishu, Somalia and moved to Sweden at a young age. Growing up between two cultures, she developed resilience and adaptability early in life. School became a place of belonging for her, particularly through her interest in mathematics, which later led her to study energy engineering at the University of Dalarna and shaped her professional path.

Faisa's career has been built around entrepreneurship and renewable energy development. She is honored to be a recipient of the Zonta Women in Business Leadership Award, an acknowledgment that reaffirmed the value of the hard work and sacrifices made behind the scenes.

The grant will be used for a family trip. After working throughout 2025 without taking a proper vacation, this will be a much needed and well-deserved break.

Faisa spends her free time with her family and friends, especially her one-year-old daughter.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Juliana Shrestha



District 25

Citizenship: Nepal

Co-founder and head of business development of Duluwa Outdoors Pvt. Ltd., Nepal

Juliana Shrestha is an entrepreneur and business leader working at the intersection of tourism, education and gender equity. Her career spans social enterprise, hospitality and community-driven ventures, and she brings strong expertise in business development, partnerships and scaling purpose-led organizations in emerging markets.

A Chevening Scholar, Juliana holds a Master of Arts in intercultural communication and international development from the University of Sheffield and a Bachelor of Business Administration from Kathmandu University. Her academic and professional grounding enables her to translate social insight into viable business models and growth strategies.

Juliana is the co-founder and head of business development at Duluwa Outdoors, a women-led experiential travel curator in Nepal. In this role, she provides strategic leadership across market expansion, partnerships, and operations, working with private sector actors, government stakeholders and international partners. Under her leadership, Duluwa Outdoors has curated immersive travel and outdoor experiences for more than 600 travelers while embedding gender equality, social inclusion and sustainability into its core business model. She also leads product development for educational adventures and oversees community-building initiatives that strengthen brand value and promote responsible tourism.

Recognized as a 30 Under 30 for Social Impact by The Bloom, Juliana combines commercial acumen with values-driven leadership, demonstrating how women-led businesses can achieve growth, resilience and meaningful impact.

In her free time, Juliana enjoys long distance running, exploring new cuisines and writing reflective pieces on life, leadership and gendered experiences.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Yukino Arai Ashida



District 26

Citizenship: Japan

Pursuing Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Yukino Arai Ashida is an MBA candidate at the University of Oxford Saïd Business School, and at an international consulting firm. She is committed to advancing women's leadership and economic empowerment through business-led and organizational approaches.

Raised in a single-mother household in Japan, Yukino developed an early awareness of the importance of financial independence for women. Early in her career at a traditional Japanese company, she witnessed structural barriers within male-dominated business environments that hindered women's advancement into leadership roles. These experiences became a driving force behind her commitment to addressing social challenges through her professional work.

As a consultant, Yukino has worked with private-sector companies, government organizations and international non-profit institutions on a range of social impact projects. Her involvement was pivotal in initiatives supporting women's economic participation—such as employment support programs for single mothers developed with financial institutions and corporate partners. Through this work, she recognized the potential of business and cross-sector collaboration to deliver sustainable and scalable solutions to social issues.

At the University of Oxford, Yukino is strengthening her expertise in organizational transformation, strategy, leadership and impact investment. She has also been selected as a member of the Impact Lab, operated by the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship of Oxford, where she collaborates with peers committed to positive social impact.

Following her MBA, Yukino plans to return to the consulting sector, specializing in diversity, equity and inclusion within the Talent & Organization practice, contributing to sustainable DEI initiatives. In the longer term, she aspires to expand these efforts beyond Japan by working with networks built through Oxford and Zonta to support positive change across Asia and globally.

In her free time, Yukino enjoys spending time with a cat at her university accommodation, visiting Oxford's beautiful libraries and participating in a university chapel choir.



2025 Zonta Women in Business Leadership Awardee

Mariana Barakchieva Roder



District 30

Citizenship: Bulgaria

Founder and chief executive officer of Nanka Creative Ltd., Bulgaria

Mariana Barakchieva Roder is the founder and managing director of Nanka Creative Ltd, a company dedicated to showing the fashion industry a more sustainable model of production. The company only produces custom-made items using 100% wool, with no mass production and new collections each season.

Mariana holds a bachelor's degree in computer science and journalism and mass communications from the American University in Bulgaria and a master's degree in computer science from the Bern University in Switzerland. After working as a programmer in a Med-tech company in Switzerland, she started her own company making sustainable and fair-made clothes from natural fibers in her hometown, Smolyan, Bulgaria.

In 2025, Mariana's company received a substantial European Union fund that will co-fund the purchase of a cutting robot. Her current focus is to buy a dedicated building for the company, where she will place the cutting robot and optimize the production process.

In addition to her work in sustainable fashion, Mariana is an environmental advocate. She organizes river cleanups, delivers educational talks for students, volunteers at a local dog shelter and leads a free business academy for aspiring entrepreneurs in her community. Following the birth of her two daughters, she has also become an advocate for legalizing home birth in Bulgaria and promotes cruelty-free, natural childbirth options for women.

In her free time, Mariana enjoys hiking and mountaineering. She is especially proud to have climbed Balmhorn Peak (3,697 meters) in the Swiss Alps—the first Alpine peak to be first conquered by a woman, Lucy Walker, in 1864.