



**WOMEN IN OCEAN SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM
STRATEGIC PLAN
June 2026 - June 2028**

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ABOUT US

[Women in Ocean Science \(WOS\)](#) is a registered charity and global community dedicated to addressing gender-specific challenges in marine science and conservation. Our mission is to empower persons identifying as women and non-binary to excel in ocean-related careers by providing essential support, training, and development opportunities. WOS believes that supporting women is integral to protecting the ocean; by amplifying women and non-binary voices, we foster an international movement aimed at driving meaningful change for marine environments.

One of WOS's key initiatives is the [University Ambassador Programme](#), a unique network of persons identifying as women and non-binary who are attending university in academic institutions worldwide. This programme supports students in their transition to early-career professionals and researchers, offering access to a global community and a safe space for development. Ambassadors are tasked with promoting participation in marine science among women and non-binary individuals. Benefits of the programme include access to professional development workshops, opportunities to represent WOS at conferences, and visibility on WOS platforms.

WOS University Ambassador Program Organization Chart

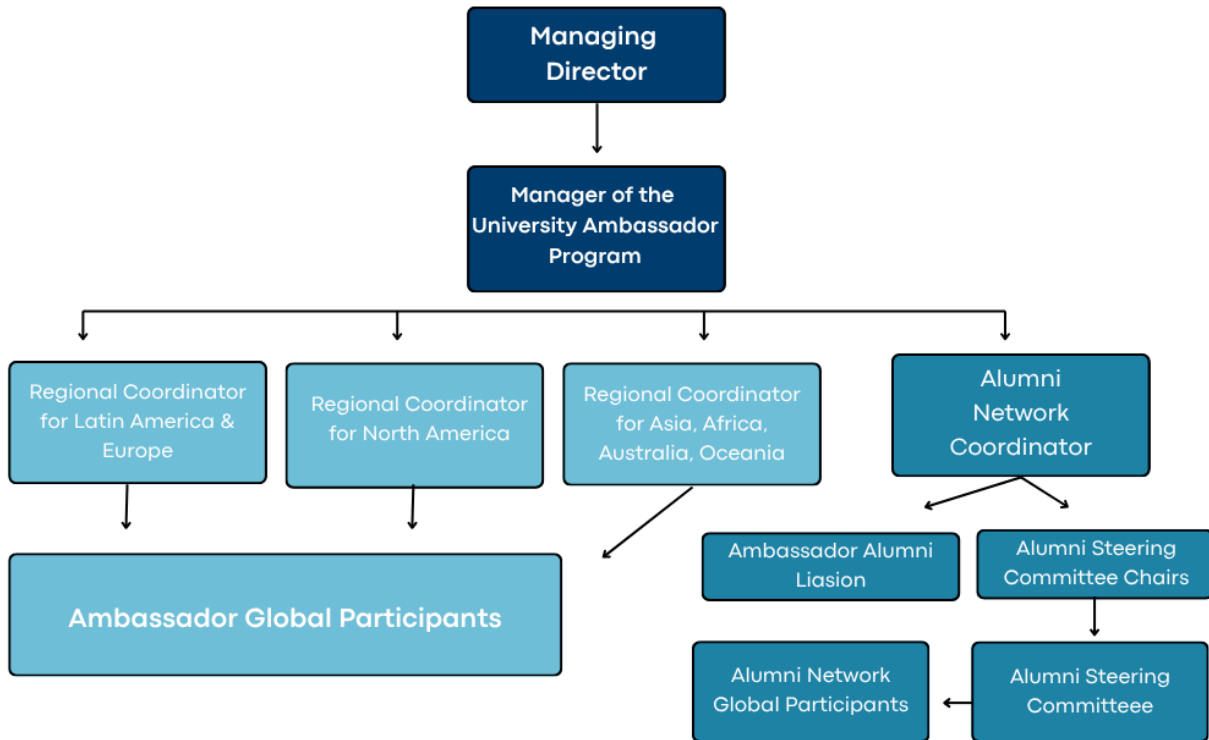


Figure 1. WOS University Ambassador Program organizational structure. The diagram illustrates the program’s governance and operational model, led by the Program Manager under the Managing Director. The Program Manager oversees three Regional Coordinators responsible for geographic program delivery and an Alumni Coordinator, who support the Alumni Steering Committee and supervises the Active Ambassador appointed as the Alumni Liaison.

Through this structure, ambassadors will receive ongoing guidance, mentorship, and support from both program leadership and their peers, creating multiple pathways for engagement, leadership development, and professional growth.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are guiding pillars of the WOS mission. The marine science sector still falls short in advancing DEIA, with persistent imbalances in gender equity, cultural representation, language accessibility, and the overuse of English, as well as the dominance of Global North institutions, costs associated with participation in marine science, financial barriers to participation, neurodiversity considerations, and other systemic challenges that can limit access to ocean science careers (1).

In response to these challenges, WOS aims to break down barriers by ensuring regional representation and expanding country representation, with the goal of maintaining a balanced number of countries represented by WOS University Ambassadors and the long term aim of having ambassadors in every coastal country.

WOS will prioritize accessibility in its operations by ensuring meetings are inclusive and by providing ambassadors with multiple ways to engage and reach out. Accessibility within the program will extend beyond language and includes flexible opportunities for participation, consideration of neurodiverse needs, and multiple avenues for ambassadors to engage with the program based on their individual circumstances, capacities, and communication preferences. At the same time, English is used for meetings and key communications to ensure that all team members can access and engage with shared information, supporting transparency across the program. However, ambassadors are encouraged to reach out to Ambassador Coordinators in other languages when possible, depending on the language capacities of the coordinating team.

SECTION A.1: Communications

Clear and consistent communication is essential to reflect the uniqueness and importance of the WOS University Ambassador Program. Our Program is a global network of university women and non-binary leaders in the marine sciences. Strategic communications (both internally and externally) help ensure ambassadors receive the visibility and recognition they deserve while empowering others to join the program. These efforts also provide an opportunity to highlight program successes, strengthen community engagement, and support broader outreach and fundraising efforts.

To strengthen this work, WOS will differentiate external and internal communications while clearly outlining the coordinating team's commitment to ambassadors. Internal communications will prioritize proactive, supportive, and timely engagement through emails and Whatsapp, following-up on inquiries in a timely manner, and organizing regional calls every semester.

External communications will focus on increasing the visibility of ambassadors, their initiatives, and the broader impact of the University Ambassador Program. Through social media platforms (primarily Instagram and Facebook), quarterly newsletters, and the WOS website, WOS will highlight ambassador achievements, share success stories, promote events, and showcase the diverse pathways women and non-binary individuals take within ocean science.

Ambassadors will also have opportunities to manage university-specific Instagram platforms or create Facebook groups to promote their local hubs, engage their campus and surrounding communities, and share relevant opportunities and events. These ambassador-led communication channels will support recruitment and community building while helping ambassadors develop professional communication, marketing, leadership, advocacy and creative skills. Collectively, these efforts will strengthen community engagement and elevate the global profile of the program.

Communication within the Ambassador Program will be a two way exchange, grounded in shared expectations and mutual accountability. WOS will clearly outline communication standards and responsibilities for ambassadors, mirroring the same standards the coordinating team holds for itself. By setting clear expectations around professionalism, responsiveness, and engagement, the program will support ambassadors in developing strong professional communication skills while reinforcing a culture of respect, reliability, and collaboration.

To further support ambassador visibility, WOS will establish clear guidance regarding ambassador participation in communication and outreach activities, including opportunities to contribute content, share achievements, promote local initiatives, and engage with WOS communication platforms.

This approach ensures communication serves not only as a coordination tool, but also as a meaningful leadership and career development opportunity for emerging ocean leaders.

Primary Goals

- Strengthen internal and external communications channels within the University Ambassador Program to strengthen community engagement
- Greater visibility of the program, the ambassadors and their activities to inspire and empower the next generation of ocean leaders
- Ensure communication efforts adequately showcase the uniqueness and importance of the University Ambassador Program

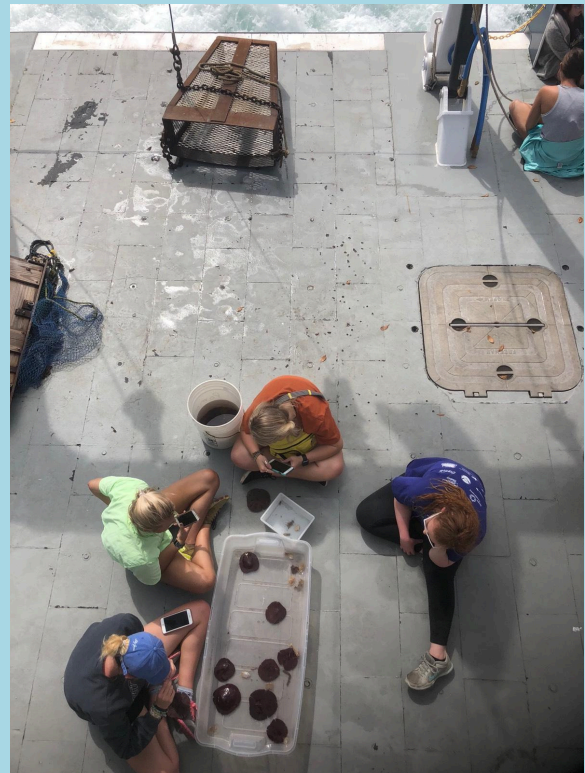
Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased visibility of the program and its ambassadors
- Encourage new ambassadors to join
- Increased community engagement
- Broadly support outreach & fundraising efforts
- Greater awareness of ambassador achievements, activities, and impact across the WOS community and external audiences

SECTION A.2: Events

Events are central to the Women in Ocean Science (WOS) University Ambassador Program, serving as key platforms for community engagement, knowledge exchange, and leadership development. Through coordinated university-based, community-centered annual programming, WOS events create intentional opportunities for students, scientists, and advocates to connect, collaborate, and advance a more inclusive and sustainable ocean future.

While some flagship initiatives, such as the World Ocean Month Clean-Up Series, are coordinated by the WOS Core Team, event implementation is led by University Ambassadors. Other events are completely designed, organized, and led by University Ambassadors, providing meaningful opportunities to develop leadership, project management, communication, and community engagement skills. WOS offers support as needed. This approach provides meaningful opportunities for University Ambassadors to develop leadership, project management, communication, and community engagement skills while ensuring consistency across global program initiatives. These events provide ambassadors with visible, meaningful leadership roles while strengthening the program's reach, cohesion, and impact across regions.



Students gather around a bucket of invertebrates on board a research vessel. *Image Credit: Madyson Miller, University Ambassador Program Manager*

To strengthen event delivery, WOS will take a structured but flexible approach that supports ambassadors in organizing meaningful events within their universities and communities. Programming will be guided by the principles of representation, accessibility, and impact, ensuring events elevate women and gender-diverse voices in ocean science while remaining inclusive and responsive to local contexts. Recognizing that ambassadors represent diverse geographic, cultural, and academic settings, WOS will provide adaptable event resources and examples that can be tailored to both coastal and inland communities, ensuring all ambassadors can meaningfully participate regardless of location. Through shared planning tools, ongoing support, and opportunities for reflection, events will serve not only as opportunities for outreach and engagement, but also as valuable leadership and professional development experiences for ambassadors.

Events will also serve as opportunities to strengthen mentorship and professional networking within the WOS community by connecting ambassadors with alumni, researchers, professionals, and community partners across regions and career stages.

Primary Goals

- Establish a consistent, values-aligned regularly updated event framework across the University Ambassador Program while allowing for local adaptation
- Increase visibility of women and gender-diverse leadership, research, and advocacy in ocean and marine sciences
- Strengthen community engagement and mentorship pathways through University-based, community-centered annual programming
- Position events as a core mechanism for ambassador leadership development, visibility, and professional growth
- Leverage events to support broader WOS outreach, partnerships, and fundraising efforts

Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased participation and engagement across Universities and regions
- Stronger connections between ambassadors, researchers, alumni, and community partners
- Greater visibility and recognition of ambassadors and their initiatives within and beyond universities
- Improved consistency, quality, and accessibility of WOS programming
- Sustained ambassador engagement and leadership capacity within the global WOS network
- Expanded mentorship and networking opportunities across University Ambassador cohorts, alumni, and ocean professionals

SECTION A.3: Fundraising

Sustainable fundraising is essential to ensuring the long-term impact and growth of the WOS University Ambassador Program. As a nonprofit organization, Women in Ocean Science relies on mission aligned donations, sponsorships, and partnerships to sustain its programs and expand opportunities for its global community. This support enables ambassadors to lead meaningful university and community initiatives, access professional development opportunities, and strengthen the visibility and credibility of Women in Ocean Science. Beyond funding, this strategy emphasizes relationship building, shared accountability, and ambassador leadership development.



A diver swims with a sea turtle near a coral reef. Image Credit: Kimberly Wong, WOS University Ambassador Alumni

Fundraising efforts within the University Ambassador Program will support both ambassador-led initiatives and the long-term sustainability of Women in Ocean Science as an organization. To achieve this balance, WOS will develop a formal fundraising framework and budget that clearly outlines fundraising priorities, financial management procedures, and the allocation of resources across the organization.

Fundraising activities will occur at two complementary levels: organization-wide fundraising coordinated by Women in Ocean Science and local fundraising initiatives led by ambassadors within their universities and communities. Organization-wide fundraising efforts will focus on supporting the long-term sustainability, growth, and strategic priorities of WOS, while ambassador-led fundraising will support local programming, events, outreach activities, and community engagement efforts. Where appropriate, fundraising initiatives may contribute to both local ambassador activities and broader organizational priorities.

As part of this process, the University Ambassador Program will actively contribute to the development of WOS fundraising strategies by identifying local funding opportunities, piloting fundraising approaches, building community partnerships, and providing feedback on resource needs across regions. WOS will provide guidance, resources, and oversight to ensure fundraising activities align with organizational policies, financial management procedures, and the mission and values of the organization.

Primary Goals

- Establish sustainable, values-aligned funding streams for ambassador programming
- Strengthen partnerships with universities, communities, alumni, and other WOS relationships
- Equip ambassadors with practical fundraising, communication, and leadership skills
- Increase the visibility and credibility of the University Ambassador Program

Anticipated Outcomes

- New mission-aligned partnerships supporting ambassador-led projects
- Funding sufficient to support at least two university events per semester
- Increased ambassador capacity in fundraising, communication, and leadership
- Strengthened WOS presence within universities and local communities
- Greater ambassador understanding of nonprofit fundraising, partnership development, and donor engagement
- Improved transparency and consistency in how fundraising activities are implemented and supported across the program

While fundraising goals provide important opportunities to expand programming and impact, ambassador participation and standing within the program will not be dependent upon fundraising success. WOS recognizes that fundraising opportunities and community capacity vary significantly across institutions, countries, and regions.

Table 1. Summary of fundraising approaches supporting the WOS Ambassador Program, including partnership development, grassroots university and community fundraising, and organization-wide initiatives.

Strategy Area	Approach	Intended Impact
Partnership Building and Networking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and engage mission-aligned University, community, and alumni partners 2. Clearly communicate partnership expectations, including branding and affiliation guidelines 3. Provide ambassadors with standardized outreach materials to articulate impact 4. Encourage networking opportunities to build community trust and assess alignment 5. Prioritize sponsorships, in-kind support, or co-investment models that directly support ambassador initiatives 6. Develop guidance documents outlining ambassador fundraising responsibilities, approval processes, and partnership expectations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stronger, more transparent partnerships grounded in reciprocity 2. Reduced risk of misrepresentation or misuse of WOS branding 3. Increased ambassador professionalism and confidence in external engagement 4. Greater consistency and accountability across ambassador fundraising activities
Community & University-Based Fundraising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host donation-based events (e.g., bake sales, trivia nights, art auctions) 2. Collaborate with student organizations, mission-aligned community organizations and academic departments 3. Utilize tabling, social media, and QR code-based donations during high-traffic events 4. Encourage ambassadors to pursue fundraising approaches that are appropriate for their local context, resources, and community interests 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased community engagement and awareness of WOS 2. Replicable fundraising models adaptable across universities 3. Strengthened ambassador skills in event planning and outreach 4. Flexible fundraising opportunities that can be adapted across diverse geographic and institutional settings

WOS-Wide Fundraising Initiatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop branded merchandise and centralized campaigns tied to specific outcomes 2. Highlight ambassador impact and stories in donor communications 3. Utilize WOS-hosted platforms for donations, matching gifts, and recurring support 4. Provide centralized fundraising opportunities that allow ambassadors to contribute to fundraising efforts even when local fundraising capacity is limited 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased donor engagement and retention 2. Sustainable funding to support program continuity and growth 3. Expanded opportunities for ambassadors to participate in fundraising regardless of local fundraising constraints
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SECTION B: RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is essential to sustaining the diversity, reach, and impact of the WOS University Ambassador Program. Each year, WOS welcomes a new cohort of ambassadors who bring fresh perspectives, regional representation, and leadership to the program. Applications for the Ambassador Program currently open each year in July until the end of August, inviting students and early career ocean leaders to join a global community committed to advancing women and non-binary voices in marine science. Through this process, WOS identifies passionate individuals who are eager to lead engagement efforts within their universities and communities while contributing to a broader international network of ocean advocates. Recruitment is conducted through a combination of open applications and targeted outreach to universities, student organizations, and marine science research institutions to ensure broad and equitable participation.



Figure 2. Historic global distribution of Women in Ocean Science University Ambassadors. The map highlights countries where WOS ambassadors are either currently active or have been active in the past. This illustrates our current reach and opportunities for expanding into underrepresented regions.

To strengthen global representation and accessibility, WOS will expand its recruitment efforts in regions that are currently less represented in the program, including Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Oceania. Recruitment efforts will prioritize relationship building with universities, marine science programs, and existing ocean networks in these regions (including faculty partnerships, university international offices, and regional ocean initiatives where available). WOS will also explore new outreach strategies such as informational webinars and collaborations with academic departments and student organizations to introduce the University Ambassador Program to new audiences. These efforts will include direct engagement with student-led environmental and marine science organizations, research labs, and early-career networks to increase visibility and accessibility. Expanding the languages used in outreach materials and recruitment resources will further support accessibility and ensure students from various countries can meaningfully engage with the application process. Application materials and key recruitment communications will be translated or adapted into multiple languages to reduce barriers to participation and improve equity in access.

Recruitment will also focus on strengthening long-term institutional connections within universities and coastal communities. By supporting ambassadors in establishing student societies or organized ambassador groups within their universities, WOS encourages leadership continuity and peer-driven recruitment across cohorts. 12

This approach allows current ambassadors to play an active role in identifying and mentoring future ambassadors while building stronger local communities connected to the global WOS network. Selection criteria will prioritize demonstrated interest in ocean science, leadership potential, commitment to equity and inclusion, and capacity to engage peers within their local or institutional context, rather than limiting eligibility to specific academic backgrounds or disciplines.

Primary Goals

- Expand global representation within the Ambassador Program, particularly in regions that are currently underrepresented
- Work toward having at least one WOS Ambassador in every coastal country over the long-term
- Achieve ambassador representation in at least 75 percent of coastal countries worldwide,
- Establish WOS student societies or ambassador groups in at least half of participating universities to strengthen continuity between cohorts
- Encourage current ambassadors to support recruitment efforts within their universities and regional networks
- Improve accessibility of the recruitment process by expanding outreach and recruitment materials in multiple languages, including translated application guidance and regionally tailored outreach strategies

Anticipated Outcomes

- Increased number and diversity of applicants from regions currently less represented in the program
- Broader geographic representation across ambassador cohorts, particularly in coastal communities around the world
- Stronger university-based ambassador communities that support continuity and leadership development across cohorts
- Increased ambassador ownership of recruitment through peer to peer outreach and mentorship
- Greater global visibility of Women in Ocean Science within universities, coastal communities, and ocean science networks, supported by expanded institutional partnerships and multilingual outreach

SECTION C: WOS ALUMNI NETWORK



Students conduct shark research. *Image Credit: Rachel Lapensee, WOS University Ambassador Alumni*

The Women in Ocean Science (WOS) Alumni Network builds on the foundation of the University Ambassador Program, extending its mission beyond graduation to create a lifelong community of women and non-binary leaders in ocean science. While the University Ambassador Program focuses on student engagement and leadership at the University level, the Alumni Network will support graduates and early-career professionals as they move into new stages of their careers by providing space for continued learning, mentorship, and collaboration. WOS is set apart by its commitment to advancing women's leadership, supporting early-career empowerment, and fostering inclusive networks that connect people across disciplines and regions.

The Alumni Network carries forward the spirit of the University Ambassador Program while expanding it into a lasting platform for professional development and collective impact. A core emphasis of the Alumni Network will be establishing consistent mentorship pathways and regular, clearly defined communication to ensure sustained engagement across cohorts.

As ambassadors progress through their careers, whether through advanced education or entering the workforce across sectors, they remain connected through a network that celebrates shared experiences and collective impact. The Alumni Network provides structure for these ongoing relationships while amplifying the reach of WOS through leadership, mentorship, and collaboration. Through the Alumni Network, WOS will cultivate an international community of leaders who elevate women's voices in ocean science and drive meaningful, lasting change for our marine environment.

Primary Goals

- Strengthen professional and personal connections among alumni across disciplines and regions
- Amplify alumni voices and achievements to inspire and empower the next generation of ocean leaders
- Ensure WOS remains a relevant, inclusive, and empowering resource throughout members' careers, supported by regular communication touchpoints and structured mentorship engagement

Anticipated Outcomes

- Strengthened retention and connection among WOS alums
- A more robust mentorship framework across ambassador cohorts, including small-group and one-on-one mentorship models
- Greater alum visibility and involvement in WOS programming
- Expanded opportunities for early-career professionals to grow and lead, supported by regular engagement and mentorship continuity

I. Program Structure

The WOS Alumni Network will be open to all former University Ambassadors in good standing, as well as select program alumni such as WOS interns, fellows, and volunteers, as approved by the WOS leadership team. A central communication hub, such as a Whatsapp workspace and alumni only website corner, will serve as the basis for alumni connection, supported by periodic newsletters or email updates (e.g., bi-monthly or quarterly updates to ensure regular communication and clarity of expectations for engagement).

Program activities will include quarterly virtual meetups or discussions, an optional annual Alumni Summit (virtual or in-person), and alum spotlight campaigns across WOS media platforms. Alumni will also have opportunities to participate in leadership, speaking, and volunteer roles. To further support engagement between the alumni and active cohort of ambassadors, one to two alumni liaisons, selected from the active cohort of ambassadors, may be appointed annually to help coordinate cross-collaboration initiatives. A steering committee of previous alumni will be organized to help gather feedback and represent the alumni cohort in program planning conversations. Additionally, a structured mentorship model will be introduced, including small mentorship pods of approximately six participants paired with one alumni mentor to facilitate peer learning, accountability, and sustained engagement.

II. Alumni Network Objectives

The WOS Alumni Network works to build a lasting and inclusive community that upholds the organization's mission of empowering women and non-binary leaders in ocean science. Each objective reflects WOS's commitment to leadership, mentorship, and connection while setting clear steps for meaningful, measurable growth within the alumni network.

The Key Objectives of the Alumni Network are to:

- **Maintain Community and Connection:** Establish a connected alumni network, including a pilot steering committee and an alumni liaison role, that brings together members from at least three regions and multiple ambassador cohorts. This process will begin with an interest survey to identify preferred communication platforms, availability, and engagement interests and will also define clear expectations for regular participation and communication cadence to ensure consistent engagement.
- **Support Ongoing Professional Development:** Host at least two professional development opportunities each year, such as virtual panels, leadership workshops, or guest speaker events, to help alumni grow in their careers and stay connected with women leaders in ocean science.
- **Build a Mentorship Network:** Introduce a mentorship program that pairs at least 20 alumni with current or new ambassadors. This will include both one-to-one mentorship pairings and small mentorship groups (approximately six members per mentor) to increase access, peer learning, and support. These partnerships will create dialogue, guidance, and encouragement while strengthening leadership development across the WOS network. Regular touchpoints will be encouraged to ensure continuity and sustained mentor-mentee engagement.
- **Increase Visibility and Impact:** Highlight alumni accomplishments through quarterly features on WOS media platforms and events, showcasing their professional impact and reinforcing WOS's role as a community that uplifts and connects women in ocean science.
- **Encourage Continued Engagement and Giving Back:** Develop opportunities for alumni to participate in WOS initiatives, such as event support, ambassador selection, and fundraising, to help build a long-term culture of connection and contribution.

References:

1. Kaikkonen, L., Shellock, R.J., Selim, S.A. et al. Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in interdisciplinary marine science. *npj Ocean Sustain* 3, 49 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44183-024-00087-1>

