H&R Block's Fund Her Future names four winners, survey reveals entrepreneurs value human support for their finances

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Four winners each receive $45,000 and a full year of expert small-business services

Fund Her Future

Fund Her Future Grant Recipients

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Oct. 29, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The women building businesses across America are growing, but most are doing it alone. A survey[1] from H&R Block's Fund Her Future grant program found that more than half launched their companies with no mentor and no support network, and that even as they embrace AI for everyday tasks, they draw a hard line at trusting it alone with their money.

The findings, drawn from the Fund Her Future applicant data, center on a single theme: entrepreneurs want human connection. They want mentors and financial experts in their corner.

H&R Block today announced the four 2026 winners of Fund Her Future, an initiative that provides funding, financial services and programming to business owners. Kate H., Vermont; Yasmine B., California; DeJanae P., Texas; Harleen C., New York, were selected from more than 6,000 applicants and awarded a $45,000 grant and a full year of small-business services from H&R Block experts. These winners were selected because of the impact they are making on their communities, and their need for both financial support and business expertise to take their businesses to the next growth stage.

Beyond the four grant recipients, H&R Block is offering every applicant a $1,000 voucher to use toward any H&R Block small-business service. This includes tax preparation, bookkeeping, payroll, and totals more than $6.3 million in free services across all 6,379 applicants.

Programs like this, which invest in female business owners, are significant because women who want to start businesses face systemic barriers to capital, receiving just 2% of global venture funding.[2] Investing in female-owned businesses delivers outsized economic and social returns, as women consistently reinvest in their families and communities.

"Female small-business owners are growing, but too many are doing it without the capital, mentorship, and financial expertise they need to truly thrive," said John Thompson, vice president of financial services and small business at H&R Block. “We go beyond funding, by providing the human support and professional services our research shows they want.”

The data[1] makes clear why that human element matters:

- **They're starting alone, without mentors:** 54% of female business owners started their companies entirely on their own, with no mentor or support network. Only 12% had a formal mentor when launching. The gap is structural, not a lack of desire: 20% did not have a network of other entrepreneurs, and 15% did not know how to find a mentor. It is a theme that runs through the applicants.
- **They want capital and financial expertise:** 79% want access to capital and funding connections, the single most requested form of support. 62% want access to financial experts such as tax professionals and bookkeepers. Yet 52% currently manage their business finances entirely by hand, and 38% have never worked with a tax advisor, bookkeeper or payroll provider.
- **They're embracing AI, but not for finances:** 79% of female business owners are already using or testing AI, and 77% expect it to help their business. While they trust AI for customer-facing tasks, they do not trust AI for financial projects. Just 7% trust AI for payroll. The finding underscores why Fund Her Future focuses on pairing grants with real people, and not just technology.

The economic backdrop gives the findings urgency with 64% of female business owners saying their business is growing and they

anticipate expansion. Yet 66% reported prior-year revenue under $100,000, and one-third are pre-revenue or earning less than $25,000. Fund Her Future's $45,000 grant gives winners the capital to bridge that gap, while the year of professional services addresses the human support the data shows they want most.

2026 Fund Her Future Winners

Kate H. is the founder of BirdieBlue, a brand that upcycles retired ski and snowboard gear into one-of-a-kind bags and accessories. By giving discarded mountain equipment a second life, Kate is building a sustainable business rooted in creativity and environmental stewardship.

Yasmine B. is the founder of Hayati Goods, a modern Arabic food brand offering premium Palestinian za'atar spice blends. Her product brings authentic flavors and cultural heritage to kitchens across the country while celebrating the rich traditions of Palestinian cuisine.

DeJanae P. is the founder of Dotted, a company offering non-toxic feminine care products and a reproductive health app designed for women navigating conditions like polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome, formerly knowns as PCOS, and endometriosis. Her business is filling a critical gap in women's health with products and technology built by and for the people who use them.

Harleen C. is the founder of Harleen Kauer, a size-inclusive and ethically produced fashion brand creating modern Indo-Western clothing, from bridal lehengas to everyday kurtas. Her designs blend South Asian craftsmanship with contemporary silhouettes, offering women culturally resonant apparel for every occasion.

For these four founders, the year ahead is about more than a grant check. It is about having someone to call when the books don't balance, when a hiring decision looms, or when a product line is ready to scale. It is the human connection that 6,379 applicants said they wanted, and that Fund Her Future was built to provide.

Visit Fund Her Future to learn more about the program and how to apply.

About the Fund Her Future Application Survey
H&R Block commissioned Hello Alice to collect data from the 2026 Fund Her Future applications, which included 6,379 applicants.

About H&R Block

H&R Block, Inc. (NYSE: HRB) provides help and inspires confidence in its clients and communities everywhere through global tax preparation services, financial products, and small business solutions. Named CNET's Best Overall online tax service for 2026, the company blends digital innovation with human expertise and care as it helps people get the best outcome at tax time and manage their money better using its mobile banking app, Spruce. Through Block Advisors and Wave, the company helps small-business owners thrive with year-round bookkeeping, payroll, advisory, and payment processing solutions. For more information, visit H&R Block News.

[1] 2026 Fund Her Future survey of 6,397 applicants through Hello Alice, commissioned by H&R Block.

[2] World Economic Forum, *Empowering female founders: How we can narrow the gender gap in venture capital*: https://www.weforum.org/stories/jobs-and-the-future-of-work/how-we-can-close-the-venture-capital-gender-gap, published Dec. 28,2023.

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