

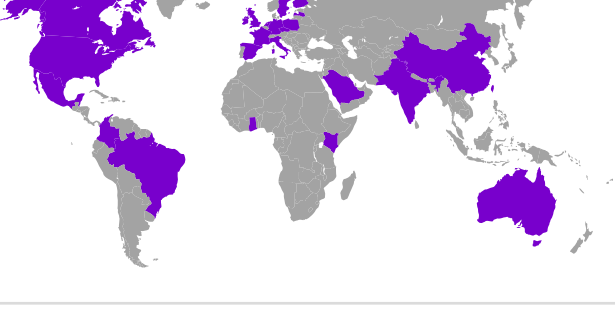
In the summer edition of the Optica Foundation Newsletter, we are highlighting and celebrating the impact of two of our programs that took place this past Spring—the Career Accelerator and Level Up Leadership. These powerful, immersive programs help prepare students and early-career professionals with the skills, mentorship and network to launch careers in optics and photonics and to develop leaders in the field, and they are only possible as a result of the generosity of donors like you.

2026 Career Accelerator & Level Up Leadership Events

 **141**
Attendees

 **25**
Countries

 **21**
Expert Speakers



Career Accelerator

This innovative program helps students and early-career professionals more easily transition from academia to industry through an engaging, multi-day experience. As part of this year's event, attendees built practical professional skills and explored real career paths from leaders across the photonics industry. More than 15 high level executives offered insights into the different facets of working in industry including sales, finance, R&D and more. Held this past May, this program was a great opportunity for the 78 attendees from 21 countries to connect with leading experts in the field and to start to develop their own network of peers as they begin their careers in photonics.



“ Going into the program, I knew the curriculum was top-tier, covering everything from corporate strategy to intellectual property. However, what truly blew me away was the quality and delivery of each speaker. **Their ability to transmit complex ideas with such passion and clarity was remarkable.** I’m returning to Mexico with a renewed vision for my career in Biomedical Engineering and AI, ready to apply everything I’ve learned to my projects. ”

Gabriel Iván García Muñiz
Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, Mexico

“ The Optica Foundation inspires me because it focuses philanthropy where it matters most: our students. Even a small change in a student’s direction during college can completely transform their future career. Programs like the Career Accelerator support students during their critical boost phase. For many, a Foundation activity is their first introduction to Optica—a place where they are welcomed and feel a true sense of belonging. **I am incredibly proud to support the Optica Foundation. No one else serves our community the way they do.** ”



Stephen Fantone
2020 Optica President,
Optica Foundation
Board Member,
Optica Foundation Donor

Level Up Leadership

This powerful, two-day experience equips emerging leaders from both academia and industry with the tools, mentoring and network that will help them lead successful teams and projects. The 2026 Level Up event was held in mid-April and was facilitated by Georgetown University professor and entrepreneur, Eric Koester. The program featured six invited senior leaders in the field, many of whom also serve on Optica Councils and/or the Optica Foundation Board. Through these lectures and workshops, Level Up is helping to build a pipeline of emerging talent who will become the next generation of scientific leaders in optics and photonics.



“ One of the reasons I support the Optica Foundation is because of the programs that I wish were in existence when I was coming up in my career. One program that I was able to experience as a volunteer this past Spring was the Level Up Leadership program. This is a really creative program. The speakers were phenomenal. And the participants – who were from all over the world and early in their careers – they were so energetic and excited. This program sets a foundation that they will use in the future. As a donor, I’m happy to support these programs. **As someone who has received so much from this field, I think it’s important that we pay it forward to support the next generation.** ”

Gisele Bennett
2026 Optica President,
Optica Foundation
Board Member,
Optica Foundation Donor

“ My most memorable experience [from 2026 Level Up] was meeting Optica Ambassador Gabrielle Thomas again during a lunch and learn about her career journey. I first met Gabrielle during the CLEO Conference in 2019, where I attended a session on how to give an effective presentation and received very valuable feedback from her. Meeting her again after several years, and having her recognize me, was a very special and memorable moment for me. Additionally, learning more about her nonlinear career journey was highly motivating and inspiring, especially as someone navigating transitions across academia, research, and startups. ”



Anupamaa Rampur
Trine Energy, United Kingdom

2025 Impact Report

See how your support is making the world a brighter place. View the Optica Foundation Impact Report.

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The work of the Optica Foundation is only possible because of our community of supporters. Your gift supports students and early-career professionals through scholarships, training programs, mentorship, recognition and a global network of support.

Help build opportunities for the next generation. Make your gift now!

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We Want to Hear from You!

We want to know more about you and your experience with the Optica Foundation. Can you spare 3-minutes to complete a short survey?

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