

THE NEW WAVE OF WOMEN FOR STARTUPS

SHE  
LEADS,  
WE  
RISE

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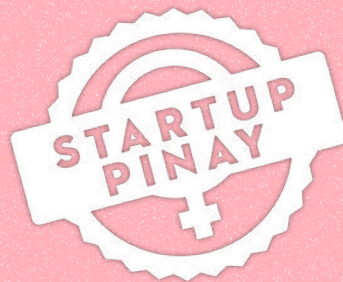


# Ideaspace | QBO

Ideaspace is the Philippines' premier startup enabler behind **Ideaspace Ventures**, a VC committed to invest in early-stage Filipino technology startups; and **QBO Innovation**, a division of Ideaspace that consults for, and engages with government agencies, academic institutions, international development agencies, and private sector enterprises in driving digital transformation strategies, developing innovation ecosystems, and accelerating technology startup growth.

Ideaspace was established in 2012 by its Chairman, Manny V. Pangilinan with the vision of supporting Filipino tech entrepreneurship, and is backed by First Pacific, Metro Pacific Investments Corporation (MPIC), PLDT-Smart, Meralco, and Maynilad, along with various public and private organizations.

QBO Innovation was created in 2016 through a partnership with Ideaspace, J.P. Morgan, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and has since been an active player in creating a globally competitive tech startup ecosystem in the Philippines.



**Startup Pinay** is a flagship program by QBO Innovation Hub dedicated to championing women in the Philippine startup ecosystem. Launched in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the initiative aims to increase representation, unlock opportunities, and build an inclusive environment where women founders, investors, and enablers can thrive. Through community-building, mentorship, and global partnerships, Startup Pinay continues to empower women to lead, innovate, and shape the future of startups in the country.



# FOREWORD

**She Leads, We Rise** is more than a celebration — it's a tribute to the women redefining leadership and shaping the future of the Philippine startup ecosystem.

Through Startup Pinay, we've remained committed to one goal: to create meaningful pathways for women to lead, thrive, and build with purpose. This campaign puts a spotlight on a powerful wave of women — many of them new faces in the startup space — who are stepping into leadership, driving bold ideas, and pushing the ecosystem forward. Alongside them are women taking on new roles and opening fresh horizons, showing us that leadership comes in many forms and continues to evolve across different stages and spaces in the ecosystem.

As we mark Women's Month, we hope these voices remind us of what's possible when women are seen, supported, and empowered. The future of startups in the Philippines must be inclusive — and we're committed to building that future together.,

*Team Q/B0*

#StartupPinay



# INDO IBAÑEZ

President, **SCALE NCR**,  
Innovation Resource Manager, **Miriam College**

Indo is the Innovation Resource Manager of the Miriam College – Henry Sy, Sr. Innovation Center, the Philippines' first integrated makerspace, where she also manages the school's Technology Business Incubator. She chairs the Entrepreneurship Department of Miriam College's Higher Education Unit and leads programs at the intersection of design, tech, community, and entrepreneurship.

A champion of inclusive innovation, Indo actively collaborates with government, academe, and private institutions to support MSMEs, startups, women entrepreneurs, and social enterprises. She currently serves as President of SCALE NCR, a startup consortium in Metro Manila, and as National President of ENEDA.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

I'm championing the activation of less engaged cities — even within NCR — to become thriving startup hubs through capacity-building and ecosystem development. While NCR is seen as the country's innovation center, many localities still need stronger support to fully join the movement.

Innovation shouldn't be limited to key business districts; it must be inclusive and accessible. By working with LGUs, schools, and industry partners, we're designing programs that equip entrepreneurs in underrepresented areas with the tools and networks they need. As an educator, I believe it takes a village to raise a founder — and that's the mindset I bring to this work.


**“CONFIDENCE IS BUILT THROUGH EXPERIENCE, AND CLARITY COMES FROM DOING.”**

**What's one aspect of the startup world that needs to change to truly empower women leaders?**

We need to break the cycle of limited access for women — to funding, networks, mentorship, and leadership opportunities. In my work with the WHWise Program of DOST-PCIEERD, and through my own research, I've seen how women-led startups continue to receive less investment despite their impact.

We must create intentional spaces where women are seen, heard, and supported. It's not just about encouraging women to lead — it's about building an ecosystem that actively champions their success.





# ASEC LENY BALUYUT

*Assistant Secretary, Competitiveness and Innovation Group (CIG)  
Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)*

Asec. Leny is the Assistant Secretary for the Department of Trade and Industry's Competitiveness and Innovation Group (CIG). In this role, she supports the DTI Secretary in crafting and executing strategies to boost trade and industry, with a focus on ensuring that innovation drives sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

With a strong background in service operations and MSME development, she has been instrumental in advancing entrepreneurship across the country. A distinguished Career Executive Service Officer (CESO), she previously served as Provincial and Regional Director of DTI Region 3.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

I believe the government should continue to provide physical spaces where startups can ideate, meet, collaborate, find talent, partners, mentors, coaches, and funding support. It is my dream for every major city in the country to have at least one dedicated building — a startup hub — built or identified for this purpose.

This hub should be supported by both the public and private sectors, operated by the private sector, and reinforced by the government through sustainable support in terms of space, equipment, and other hard infrastructure.

**“FAILURE IS PART OF ANY ENDEAVOR, BUT IF YOU HAVE A GOAL—FOCUS ON IT, WORK ON IT, AND STAY PATIENT. AS NAPOLEON HILL SAID, ‘PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, AND PERSPIRATION MAKE AN UNBEATABLE COMBINATION FOR SUCCESS.’”**

**What guiding principle has allowed you to navigate the PH startup ecosystem and create meaningful change?**

I believe in the power of collaboration and expanding networks to create ripple effects that drive economic dynamism.

As Assistant Secretary of DTI's Competitiveness and Innovation Group, I

I take a proactive role in enabling the startup ecosystem. Startups are drivers of innovation, offering solutions that boost industry competitiveness. Through DTI's Startup Development Programs, we support startups at the commercialization stage with skills training, mentorship, funding, and market access to help them scale.



# KRIS ALDOVER-YSMAEL

*Vice President for Investor Relations,  
**Metro Pacific Investments Corporation** and  
Chief Financial Officer(CFO), **IdeaSpace Foundation, Inc.***

Kris has been with MPIC's Investor Relations team since 2010 and currently serves as Head of IR, managing investor engagement, and financial modeling. She also works closely with the CEO, CFO, and Chief Sustainability Officer, contributing to both MPIC's financial strategy and sustainability initiatives.

Kris recently entered the startup space as CFO of IdeaSpace Foundation, where she supports early-stage ventures with financial and investment expertise. With over 18 years of experience in finance, investor relations, and advisory, she brings sharp insight and steady leadership to both corporate and startup ecosystems.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

I'm championing the integration of sustainability and social responsibility into the core of startup business models. Startups should think beyond profit and embed purpose early on — from eco-friendly practices to inclusive hiring and community impact.

This mindset not only attracts values-aligned investors and customers but also builds a stronger, more resilient ecosystem for the long term.

**"I LEARNED TO TRUST MY VOICE AND VALUE MY PERSPECTIVE. CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN BREAKING BARRIERS AND CREATING LASTING IMPACT."**

**What's one aspect of the startup world that needs to change to truly empower women leaders?**


Access to mentorship and funding is still a major hurdle for women in startups. We need to create more opportunities for women to connect with mentors, build networks, and secure capital.

Visibility also matters. Celebrating women's achievements and telling their stories inspires others to follow. Greater diversity in funding decisions and leadership will help build a more inclusive, supportive ecosystem where women can thrive.

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**METRO  
PACIFIC**  
INVESTMENTS





# ALWYN ROSEL

*Executive Director,  
IdeaSpace | QBO Innovation*

Alwyn began her career in the BPO industry before making the shift to the startup space in pursuit of something different. Her first role in the ecosystem was with UPScale Innovation Hub (formerly UP Enterprise TBI), where she found her passion for supporting entrepreneurs — and she's been building with startups ever since.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

I wouldn't call it a bold change, but something I continue to champion is strengthening collaboration between startups, corporates, and government.

The Philippine startup ecosystem has grown so much, but we still need to address key challenges around funding, market access, and long-term support. By fostering deeper partnerships — whether through corporate innovation programs, inclusive accelerator models, or government-backed initiatives — we can help startups scale while ensuring innovation creates real economic and social impact.

**“SAY YES — EVEN WHEN IT’S DAUNTING. THAT’S HOW YOU GROW, BUILD CONFIDENCE, AND KEEP RISING IN A FAST-MOVING WORLD LIKE STARTUPS.”**

**What steps should we take to support the next wave of women in startups?**

We need to be more intentional about building a truly inclusive and supportive ecosystem for women.

Expanding access to mentorship, opening up more opportunities, and building strong linkages can help women founders grow their confidence and navigate the startup space with more support. But beyond resources, we also need to shift culture.

Academic institutions, government, companies, incubators, accelerators, and investors must actively promote diverse leadership, challenge bias, and create spaces where women feel empowered to lead. With these efforts, we can help the next generation of women in startups rise and thrive.



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# MARIA SUCGANG

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)  
and Co-Founder, **Remotify**

Maria Sucgang is the CEO and Co-Founder of Remotify, a company redefining the future of work through its Employer of Record plus (+) solution. With 18 years of global experience across APAC and EMEA, she has led high-performing teams in six countries, driving organizational transformation and service excellence.

Previously, she served as Global Head of Service Experience at Truphone, where she supported top brands like Apple, Tesla, and Netflix. Maria brings deep expertise in strategic operations, service design, and customer experience, and is passionate about building human-centered, future-ready workplaces.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

It only takes one success to hit a tipping point and open the gates for more — and that's exactly what we're working toward at Remotify. As a Filipino woman tech founder, I want to prove that being capital efficient, staying lean, and innovating is the new sexy.

We bootstrapped until our revenue model and growth path were solid. Now we're raising from a position of strength, not on untested assumptions. We're proud to have built Remotify to a \$1.4M topline in 2024, and we're on track for a \$1.8M run rate in Q1 2025 — all with just five full-time employees, founders included, serving clients in 10 countries.

We're building the operating system for a new world of Work, Workforce, and Workplace — with better remote employees, AI agents, and remote managers powering better businesses.

**“TO TRULY EMPOWER WOMEN IN STARTUPS, WE NEED TO EXTEND BEYOND MENTORSHIP TO PROVIDE REAL SPONSORSHIP AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT CHALLENGE THEM, AND RECOGNIZE THEIR POTENTIAL TO LEAD AND INNOVATE.”**

**What key lesson or mindset shift helped you rise in your journey that you want to share with other women?**

What I really want to share, especially with other women, is how powerful it is to understand and use your unique strengths and perspectives. It's about **having the courage to speak up, stand by what you believe in**, and not just occupy a space — but reshape it.

Keep learning. Keep building your skill stack. This mindset has helped me leadership challenges and inspired me to build Remotify as a force for good. My goal is to take Remotify global within three years, serve on boards to mentor the next generation of founders, begin angel investing, and deepen my work in education, inclusion, and job creation.

**Remotify**





# ABIGAIL TAN

*Co-Founder and Managing Partner,  
ARQ Capital*

Abigail is the Co-Founder and Co-Managing Partner of ARQCapital, an alternative investment firm focused on building sustainable and inclusive futures in the Philippines. With over 17 years of experience in banking and private equity, she played a key role in establishing ARQ SME BDC, a non-bank financial institution providing smart growth capital and strategic support to SMEs.

Prior to ARQ, Abigail worked on Asian infrastructure investments at Partners Group in Singapore and held advisory roles at Polestrom Advisors, ING Bank, and Credit Suisse. She holds an MBA from HKUST and is a Certified Public Accountant.

## **What guiding principle has allowed you to navigate the PH startup ecosystem and create meaningful change?**

At ARQ SME BDC, we believe that capital is not just financial—it's enabling. Our guiding principle is to invest in SMEs with a long-term view, providing not only smart capital but also value-added financial governance support to help them scale sustainably. This approach ensures a sustainable, fundamental and inclusive change by fostering businesses that drive economic growth and generate lasting impact.

**“CAPITAL IS A CATALYST, BUT THE RIGHT PARTNERS FUEL SUSTAINABLE GROWTH. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK — JUST MAKE SURE YOU'RE BUILDING WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR VISION AND VALUES.”**

## **What steps should we take to support the next wave of women in startups?**

We need to go beyond gender-lens talk — we need action. That means dedicated funding pools for women-owned and -led businesses, mentorship opportunities, and inclusive investment policies. Through SheSecure, ARQ provides tangible, scalable support to help women founders grow beyond small, while also advancing gender equality within their organizations.



**ARQ SME BDC**

SMART CAPITAL PARTNER FOR SMEs

# NIÑA TEROL

*Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO),  
Imaginable Impact and founder*

Niña is a communications and strategy leader with 25 years of experience spanning corporate, advocacy, government, and startup sectors. She has led marketing and comms for telcos, global venture builders, non-profits, and progressive policymakers, while also working across industries like banking, energy, and tech.

A former journalist, author, lecturer, and founder of three consulting firms, Nina entered the startup space in 2015 as a mentor — and never looked back. Today, she's a full-time founder dedicated to championing women in the startup ecosystem.

**What bold change are you championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and the PH startup ecosystem?**

At Imaginable Impact and FoundHer, we're championing female founders — and their power to unlock the female-led economy.

A 2021 World Bank report found that improving gender equality in the Philippines could boost GDP by seven percentage points. That's huge. Now imagine more women building solutions for underserved markets, launching innovations, and creating value that other investors might overlook.

Imagine if more women had the means to invest in these ventures. The ripple effect on our economy — and our culture — would be transformational.

**“A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS. WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER TO SHIFT CULTURE AND CHANGE THE ECOSYSTEM, WE DON'T JUST HELP OURSELVES — WE HELP EVERYONE.”**

**What guiding principle has allowed you to navigate the PH startup ecosystem and create meaningful change?**

One of my key guiding principles is multi-sectoral collaboration. Real change happens when we break out of our bubbles, reach across sectors, and co-create systems that make change sustainable.

From my time in government, I've learned that you can't create meaningful change from the outside. You need to work within the system — shape policies, influence institutions, and get buy-in from leaders across all levels of the ecosystem. It's tough, but it's how lasting impact is made.





# CANDICE QUIMPO

*Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer (COO),  
Imaginable Impact and founder*

Candice is an impact storyteller and strategist with over two decades of experience in editorial, communications, and narrative-building for social change. Her work has long intersected with the startup space — from the early days of Chikka, to platforms spotlighting Filipino entrepreneurs and diaspora founders, to shaping stories that drive inclusion and influence leadership.

She draws from a rich background across media, corporate communications, and content strategy — all rooted in a deep belief in storytelling as a catalyst for personal and systemic transformation.

## **What key lesson or mindset shift helped you rise in your journey that you want to share with other women?**

There's a lot of systemic and cultural programming we need to unlearn. For a long time, the image of a startup founder has been shaped by the "startup bro" — from the books we read to the case studies we study. But that model doesn't always reflect our realities as women, especially those navigating roles as mothers, daughters, caregivers, and leaders all at once.

Shifting my mindset was one thing, but real change happens when we do it together — in community. That's why "leading like a girl" also means building a village with other women, allies, and advocates who are committed to making the startup space more inclusive and equitable. Because when women thrive, everyone else does too.

## **"IT'S OKAY — EVEN NECESSARY — TO LEAD LIKE A GIRL."**

## **What's one aspect of the startup world that needs to change to truly empower women leaders?**

Filipinas are still largely invisible — in investment pipelines, pitch competitions, decision-making rooms, and even in the data that shapes policies. Without their stories in the mainstream, we risk narrowing our idea of what a woman founder looks like and what's "investable."

That's why we need more spaces where women feel they belong, and more narratives that reflect the range of roles they fulfill. A diversity of Filipina founders means a diversity of innovation — and that benefits the entire ecosystem.

**foundher**



# GUAYYA MELGAR

*Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO),  
Mochi Solutions*

Guaya is the CEO and Co-Founder of Mochi Solutions, a fintech startup launched in 2022. She currently works as a Financial Sector Specialist at the World Bank and previously co-founded Vesl, a credit insurance startup, where she served as CFO. She also supported access to finance initiatives as a Technical Associate at USAID's DELIVER Project.

**What guiding principle has allowed you to navigate the PH startup ecosystem and create meaningful change?**

**Stay close to the people you're building for.**

At Mochi, we built with small business owners in mind, so we spend a lot of time listening — to their frustrations, challenges, and what makes their lives easier. That constant feedback loop keeps us grounded and honest. It's easy to get distracted by trends or shiny tech, but staying close to real problems is what leads to real, meaningful impact.

**“YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT TO BE ‘READY.’ I HAD DOUBTS TOO — BUT FIGURING IT OUT AS YOU GO IS PART OF THE JOB. TRUST YOUR GUT AND MOVE.”**

**What's one aspect of the startup world that needs to change to truly empower women leaders?**

**We need to stop rewarding loudness over substance.** Many women are out there doing the work — leading teams, building companies, and making things happen — but they're not always the loudest in the room. We need to look beyond confidence theater and start valuing leaders who bring empathy, clarity, and real results to the table.





# IYANA ARGAÑOZA

*Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO),  
Serbiz*

Iyana founded her first startup, Serbiz, at just 21 years old. With roots in UI/UX design and a love for technology, she began coding at 19 and quickly carved her path from creative to corporate, landing a role as a summer analyst at JPMorgan Chase & Co.

## **What is one bold change you are championing that you believe will shape the future of startups and/or the PH startup ecosystem?**

I'm championing the push from 0 to 1. In the Philippines, a lot of ideas stay in stealth mode for too long — stuck in the MVP or ideation stage. I've seen so many promising concepts shared at community events that never make it past version one, if they launch at all.

We need to build a culture that encourages people to start — and more importantly, one that convinces others to believe in early-stage ideas before they're polished or proven. In places like the U.S. and Singapore, entire ecosystems rally behind founders from day one. We need that same kind of early belief and a bigger risk appetite across the board.

**“BELIEVE IN THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE LUCK — IF YOU WORK HARD, STAY PERSISTENT, AND KEEP SHOWING UP, THE UNIVERSE WILL EVENTUALLY BEND TO YOUR WILL. THE RESULTS MAY NOT COME ALL AT ONCE, BUT YOU’LL START TO SEE THE RIPPLES TAKE SHAPE.”**

## **What steps should we take to support the next wave of women in startups?**

**Nurture their vision.** Support means helping them bring their ideas to life — by connecting them to mentors, introducing them to investors, and creating more financial opportunities focused on women-led startups. Sometimes, all it takes is someone who believes in what they're building.



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# SHE LEADS



## THE NEW WAVE OF W

### **Startup Pinays Featured**

ASec. Leny Baluyut • Candice Quimpo  
Iyana Argañosa • Kris Aldover – Ysmael  
Niña Terol • Indo Ibañez • Maria Sucgang  
Guaya Melgar • Abigail Tan • Alwyn Rosel

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