

# **For Girls in Science”: Teen Girls Receive Mentorship to Chart Their Path as Future Women in Science** <sup>[1]</sup>

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As a child, *Arianis Encarnación*'s idea of a science professional was a man in a white lab coat. It was difficult to picture a woman in the field because they're often invisible in leadership positions or their contributions are overlooked.

However, a year ago, the teenager began to see and learn from real-life women scientists through the *Semillas de Triunfo* (Seeds of Triumph) program from the nonprofit *Ciencia Puerto Rico* (CienciaPR). That experience prepared her to now become part of "*For Girls In Science*", a program developed by the organization in collaboration with *L'Oréal Caribe* to promote the growth and development of girls in STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and math.

"People don't often think about all the women scientists that exist. It's very important for us to have that representation from a young age—to know that there *are* women in science and that you can be one of them too. And being able to see them in person, standing in front of you, inspires you even more to believe it's possible," said the 14-year-old from *Canóvanas*, who dreams of becoming a thoracic surgeon.



A group of 26 high school students from across Puerto Rico gathered in person this Saturday to kick off the fourth class of *"For Girls In Science,"* a program designed to foster connections, develop STEM skills, and guide participants in planning for successful careers in science.

These girls, in grades 9 through 11, are all alumnae of *Semillas de Triunfo*, a program that gives middle school students an early look into the wide range of STEM career paths while building leadership skills. After completing it, each participant becomes a *"STEM Ambassador"* by leading an outreach project in their school or community.

In *"For Girls In Science,"* these future scientists now take on the role of mentors to new *Semillas de Triunfo* students. In turn, they receive personalized mentoring to help develop an academic plan tailored to their STEM interests, mapping out the steps they need to take to reach their desired university program.

“This plan isn’t set in stone,” explained *Greetchen Díaz*, executive director of CienciaPR. “Their interests might change, but if they do, these girls now have the tools and experience to adapt and revise their path.”

Díaz added that the girls are also guided in identifying their current support systems—and in expanding them through networking.

“As part of the process, we ask them: Who are the people supporting you? Who can help you reach your goals? The idea behind *For Girls In Science* is that they grow their circle—adding their mentor, the CienciaPR team, L’Oréal... Who can I reach out to when I need help?” said Díaz.

This second-tier program also exposes the teens to more advanced experimentation, particularly in engineering design. For example, in their first in-person session, participants were tasked with designing a prototype of a handwashing station using household materials for use in unconventional spaces like a park or gas station.

“The beauty of creating a prototype is that no matter what career path they choose, this is an essential skill—developing a product. Whether it’s in science or not, the design process is very similar,” Díaz emphasized.

“*For Girls In Science*” is part of a global initiative by *L’Oréal Paris*, which runs in both France and Puerto Rico to support the next generation of women scientists. According to *Liana Camacho*, VP of Marketing at L’Oréal Caribe, this program represents the company’s *responsibility* to empower girls in STEM.

“Creating communities of girls and women who can connect, empower each other, and know that they have a support network is crucial at every stage of life,” said Camacho. “At the ages when they begin *Semillas* and later *For Girls In Science*, these are critical years for self-esteem. It’s the moment when they need to understand that they *do* have potential—even when something is challenging, there’s support to help them get there.”

Another goal of the program is to equip the girls with the tools to navigate the structural barriers they may face as women pursuing careers in science and leadership.

“We know this isn’t a burden they should carry alone, and they’re not responsible for fixing the system. But we want to make sure they have the tools and understanding to face it,” Díaz affirmed.

In past years, the program hosted 20 girls per cohort, but this year it expanded to 26 thanks to the support of *Mano Amiga*, a program of *Fundación Plaza Las Américas*. CienciaPR tracks the development of *Semillas de Triunfo* participants for up to six years—including those enrolled in *For Girls In Science*—to monitor long-term impact and growth.

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