



Ask Me Anything



Institutional Influence: Exploring Anti-Racism Secretariats



Featuring: Farah Boisclair, Seema Chowdhury and Michelle Seymour

Opening remarks: Aalya Dhanani

Moderated by: Peter Flegel and Samantha Moonsammy

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Co-hosted by: Peter Flegel and Samantha Moonsammy

Date and time: Wednesday, November 24 at 1:00 to 2:30 PM EST

Audience: Open to all Government of Canada employees

Register: [Online registration form](#)

Link to join: [Join the Live Event](#)

Ask Me Anything is now on GC Collab! **Click [HERE](#) to join the group.** Access [past recordings of AMAs on YouTube](#).

Event description

For November we are going to celebrate institutional progress being made by innovative public servants who lead departmental anti-racism initiatives. We are pleased to provide a platform for these amazing individuals who are trailblazing anti-racism work in the federal public service.

Anti-racism secretariats are rooted in the truth that racism and discrimination exists at systemic and individual levels. To create a more equitable system, change is required at the organizational and individual level. Individuals working in this space, and departments supporting this initiative, understand that harm is done in many ways; both purposely and through a lack of understanding and awareness.

Join us today to continue to unpack your unconscious bias and learn how you can continue to make communities and workplaces safer for all those who access them.

Meet Our Amazing Panelists



Opening Remarks by Aalya Dhanani (She/Her), Co-Founder and Head of Engagement & Community Building, Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network (ARAN)

Aalya is a community connector and policy professional with Transport Canada. She has worked in the Federal Public Service for over 12 years. More recently, she has also joined the Canada School of Public Service as Associate Faculty to deliver training on Anti-Racism and Mental Health topics. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and an M.A. in Sociology with specialization in Feminist and Gender Studies. Aalya brings her education, insight and experience of working across horizontal communities, GBA+, and mental-health background to the team. Her lived experiences as a WOC in the South Asian diaspora, passion and commitment to dismantle systemic racism, led her to the Network.

Aalya was born in Tanzania and immigrated to Canada with her family in the 1990's. Aalya is a firm believer in bringing empathy to the way we work and live.



Farah Boisclair, Anti-Racism Task Force, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Farah Boisclair is the lead of the newly created Anti-Racism Task Force at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. She has extensive experience in Human Resources, working in this field for over 13 years, both at IRCC and at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Farah is passionate about advancing equity through action and creating spaces where people can be free to be themselves.



Michelle Seymour, Director of the Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion Division, Infrastructure Canada

Michelle Seymour is a wife, a mother and a dynamic leader in the Public Service with over 23 years of professional experience; many of which were at the Department of National Defence.

Michelle is the Director of the Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion Division at Infrastructure Canada, a Black woman and a vocal advocate in the call to address Anti-Racism. She provides a holistic approach that combines personal and professional knowledge to create space for the braver and much needed discussions necessary to advance

dismantling institutional barriers within the Public Service.

Michelle is dedicated to making a difference so future public servants and next generations of Canadians won't face the same systemic racism, discrimination and barriers from institutions and the world around them.



Seema Chowdhury, Civilian Advisor, Anti-Racism Secretariat, National Defence

Seema Chowdhury is a Civilian Advisor with the Anti-Racism Secretariat under the newly created Chief Professional Conduct and Culture organization. She has been with the department of National Defence for over 15 years, and has significant experience in the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion space including HR Planning and Programs. Seema is a strong advocate for promoting open dialogue and conversation, and turning them into meaningful action in advancing equity and inclusion within the Defence Team.

Meet Our Co-Moderator



Peter Flegel, Executive Director, Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat

Peter Flegel is the Executive Director of the Government of Canada's Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat, a cornerstone of *Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy*. With his diverse team, Peter is driving whole-of-government systems change in the federal government from an anti-racism perspective. This has entailed reaching and engaging close to 4 million people across Canada to inform policy making, helping shape new federal policies and legislation, collaborating with foreign allies and working with federal departments and central agencies to implement an anti-racism framework for the entire federal public service. Peter has a distinguished career as a social entrepreneur, fundraiser, columnist, community organizer and musician, with extensive Canadian and international experience working in multilingual and multicultural settings. He has a history of leadership in the government, NGO and philanthropic sectors, in areas including anti-racism, equity, human rights, innovation, culture, international affairs and entrepreneurship.

Meet the Host of *Ask Me Anything*



Samantha Moonsammy, National Defence

Samantha Moonsammy is the L1 Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion for the Materiel Group founded at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa, Canada. She has spent over 15 years in the public service working in numerous communications, outreach and engagement initiatives that focuses on the people side of business.

But Samantha is much more than that. Her layers include being a woman, mother, partner, daughter, sister, community builder and immigrant. As an Indo-Caribbean Canadian she was born in Guyana, South America and immigrated to Canada as a toddler. From a young age, dating back to elementary school to the present, Samantha has been a leader in diversity, inclusion and equity, always helping to amplify

the voice of others and create sustainable change in organizations to build deeper respect and understanding for all humans. Samantha lives in the Ottawa area and spent some time in Toronto and Barbados during her Master's degree in Communications and Culture. She is a passionate world traveller who has worked and studied in India, China, France and the Caribbean. Her daily mantra: Be the change you wish to see in the world.

Mission - Ask Me Anything Series

We recognize that individuals are composed of a multitude of layers that make us who we are. We do not fit easily in one box or another and we can't be neatly counted. We represent the mosaic of Canada.

It is important that we find value in each other's experiences, differences and unique characteristics. When we build our cultural competencies, we are able to work better together in our teams and respond to each other with relevance, empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain greater appreciation of each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

We know through diversity, workplaces and communities are stronger, more successful and resilient. And most important, it creates spaces of inclusion and fosters a workplace of belonging where people feel valued.

#AMACHallenge

We encourage others to have courageous conversations with their peers. Use the monthly Ask Me Anything sessions as an opportunity to have brave conversations in your workplaces with your teams.

Here's what you need to do:

- Invite your leaders and colleagues in your organization to an Ask Me Anything watch party, tune in live and watch the session together. Make sure it's in their calendars.
- Before the watch party, book a "After the AMA – Team Session" with your immediate team for the day after the event for 30-60mins. Share the resource guide and have these questions for discussion.

After the AMA – Team Session Discussion Questions

1. What was my main takeaway – expand and share an amazing quote, story or moment
2. What made me uncomfortable/ what was one of my blind spots?
3. What is an example of a systemic discrimination that I am aware of in my life?
4. What am I not going to do anymore?
5. How can I use my voice/ influence – both overtly/covertly
6. Where am I going to dig in and learn more?
7. How will I continue this conversation?

It is important that we find value in the experiences, the unique characteristics of each other. When we develop our cultural competence, we are able to work better together within our teams and respond to each other with relevant empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain a greater appreciation for each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

Thank you to our contributors

Thank you to our contributors from across the Public Service of Canada – Canadian Coast Guard, Health Canada, National Defence, Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat, Infrastructure Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network (ARAN).

MCs: Peter Flegel and Samantha Moonsammy

Panelists: Seema Chowdhury, Aalya Dhanani, Michelle Seymour and Farah Boisclair

AMA Team: Tara Lockhart, Terri-Ann Hurst, Melissa Michaud, Natasha Lim, Jasmine Cousineau, Shelby Racine, Katie Freer, Lyrique Richards, Liliya Ishkaeva, Laura Raine, Lorraine Mason, Salisa Bose, Theresa Graham, Kurtis DePippo. Kelly Brewer-Balch and Karim Kanji.