

Panelists



Ask Me Anything
International Women's Day
A Courageous Conversation with Women in STEM

Time: 1:00 pm EST **Date:** March 9, 2022 **Hosts:** Samantha Moonsammy and Anu-Heidi Shukla-Jones

Ask Me Anything: International Women's Day A Courageous Conversation with Women in STEM

Featuring: Vidya ShankarNarayan, Anita Yengue and Jennifer Rice

Opening Remarks: Charu Kaushic

Co-hosted by: Anu-Heidi Shukla-Jones and Samantha Moonsammy

Date and time: Wednesday, March 9 at 1:00 to 2:30PM EST

Audience: Open to all Government of Canada employees

Register: [Online registration form](#)

Link to join: [Join the webinar](#)

Ask Me Anything is now on GC Wiki Collab <https://wiki.gccollab.ca/AMA> .

Event description

Did you know that women are far more likely to enroll in a bachelor's degree program than men?* Despite this, women have a 30% lower probability than men of enrolling in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs after high school. Of these women, only 8 will graduate with a degree, for every 10 men who do.

What influences a woman's decision to choose this field? What challenges does she continue to face in 2022? Why does this underrepresentation persist? This year, on International Women's Day, we celebrate Women Inspiring Women. This is exactly what this Ask Me Anything session is all about. Our guest speakers will share what led to their choice to join the STEM field. The panel will examine how their gender has

influenced their career and how gender should be integrated to benefit the STEM disciplines.

*For the purpose of this AMA, the binary construct of gender has been selected based on our guest speakers' gender and their experiences.

About the Ask Me Anything Series

This session is part of a series of Ask Me Anything sessions that give us a platform to share stories, listen, ask respectful questions and continue on our journey to becoming more inclusive organizations.

As individuals, you can't necessarily change where you live. You certainly can't change your past, but you can adjust who influences you—through the authors you read, the music you listen to, movies you watch and interactions with your community. The *Ask Me Anything* series provides you with an opportunity to increase your perspective—to learn from the lived experiences of individuals who are bravely sharing their stories to help educate and move the public service towards a culture where equity is embedded.

The series also provides an opportunity for you to know that you aren't alone. These experiences, especially the negative ones, are systemic and happen all too frequently throughout the public service. The objective by shining this light is to continually increase the network of public servants ready to take action and move forward towards a culture of inclusivity and belonging.

Meet Our Amazing Panelists



Opening Remarks by Charu Kaushic, PhD, the Scientific Director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) - Institute of Infection and Immunity

Charu Kaushic has served in this role since July 1, 2018. Dr. Kaushic is also a tenured Full Professor in the Department of Medicine in McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada. In her role as the Scientific Director for CIHR-III, Dr. Kaushic is responsible for making decisions for CIHR strategic investments in the area of infection and immunity, nationally and internationally. She also represents CIHR and Government of Canada at various national and international forums related to infectious diseases. In this capacity, she serves as a Chair of GloPID-R, a global consortium of funders in pandemic preparedness and emergency response research. She also

represents Canada on the JPIAMR Steering Committee. During the COVID-19

pandemic, she has been closely involved in shaping CIHR's research response to the pandemic and is serving on Canada's COVID-19 National Immunity Task Force.

Dr. Kaushic has a PhD in Immunology and did her post-doctoral training in mucosal immunology. Since her faculty appointment in McMaster in 2002, she has done extensive teaching and training in immunology and built an interdisciplinary research program in women's reproductive health, specifically basic, clinical and translational research examining susceptibility and immune responses to sexually transmitted viruses, HIV-1 and HSV-2. Prior to joining CIHR, Dr. Kaushic's research program was funded by CIHR, CFI, CANFAR and OHTN. She has received numerous national and international awards including a Rockefeller post-doctoral fellowship, CIHR New Investigator Award, OHTN Research Scholar award, OHTN Research Chair award and the 2017 American Journal of Reproductive Immunology Research Excellence Award.



Vidya ShankarNarayan, CIO & Assistant Deputy Minister, Information Systems Branch, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Over the past 25 years, Vidya has held multiple positions in both the private and public sectors, leading high-profile initiatives related to service delivery and digital technologies. Previously, Vidya worked at Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), where she passionately focused on improving and innovating digital policy and service delivery with a vision of designing and implementing simpler and efficient digital government services. Vidya has also held executive positions at the

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Global Affairs Canada and Passport Canada. She holds a Masters degree in Architecture, specializing in Design and Technology from Carleton University.

Vidya is an active community member, participating on various boards, including the World Economic Forum, Global Blockchain Congress and Algonquin College. In her spare time, Vidya practices yoga and meditation and is a champion for diversity and inclusion.



Captain Anita Yengue, Aerospace Engineer Officer (AERE), PMO FWSAR (Hull), System Engineering Management, National Defence

Captain Anita Yengue is an Aerospace Engineer (AERE) Officer currently employed in the PMO FWSAR, as a member of the System Engineering Management (SEM) team, Hull, Québec, since July 2021. Capt Yengue was born in Cameroon and immigrated to Canada at a young age. During her teenage years, she became a Canadian citizen and completed an undergraduate degree in Electromechanical Engineering in 2006. From 2006-2007, she became a spokesperson for “The Hats Off to You! contest and its Excellence in Science segment” organized by the Québec

government, showcasing the determination and work of women enrolled in a vocational training or technical training program, or a bachelor’s program in science or technology that leads to a career in a traditionally male-dominated occupation. Upon receiving her education, Capt Yengue worked in the manufacturing industry as an Electronic Project Lead Engineer in St-Georges de Beauce, Québec and a Project Manager for a start-up in Ottawa. While working full time, she became a professor, teaching in various technical colleges within the National Capital Region (NCR).

In October 2012, Capt Yengue joined the Canadian Armed Forces. After she completed the AERE trade course in Borden in 2015, she was posted to 1 Canadian Air Division (CAD) Winnipeg, where she worked in the A4 Maintenance Transport Search and Rescue cell. In 2018, she was then transferred to 435 Sqn (Transport & Rescue) Winnipeg as the Aircraft Maintenance Support Officer (AMSO) and Aircraft Maintenance Officer (AMO) in support of Operations. In 2020, while employed at 435 Sqn, Capt Yengue completed a graduate degree in business administration (MBA).

As a tutor, Capt Yengue has worked closely for underprivileged youth & refugees. She strongly believes that through education, all is possible for Canada’s youth. As a woman who identifies herself as part of a racialized group, she believes that embracing diversity and providing fair opportunities is key to ensuring a bright future for all Canadians. Proud to serve, she considers Canada’s diversity a strength and a way to showcase our Canadian values, objectives and goals on the world stage.



**Jennifer Rice, Canadian Coast Guard College,
Officer Cadet Training Program**

Jennifer Rice completed a BSc in Mathematics, a BEd in teaching mathematics at Dalhousie University and a Diploma in Engineering from Cape Breton University. She has been an Instructor at the Canadian Coast Guard College in Sydney, Nova Scotia, since 2001.

Jennifer began her teaching career in the village of Inukjuak in Nunavik, Northern Quebec. Shortly after, she moved to the community of Kujjuarrappik to join the adult education team at a school shared by both the Inuit and Cree members of the community. Following the birth of her child, she returned to life in Sydney.

A chance meeting with an Instructor from the Canadian Coast Guard College led Jennifer to apply for a term position teaching Physics to a fantastic group of students from Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The following year, she was offered a contract with the College and has been enjoying working with Officer Cadets in the Officer Cadet Training program ever since. She was the first female Instructor in the Sciences and has enjoyed teaching Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Stability during her career.

Jennifer's passions outside of work include hiking, snowshoeing, biking, paddle boarding and fishing.

Meet Our Moderator



Anu-Heidi Shukla-Jones, Senior Advisor on Research Excellence, Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Anu Shukla-Jones has always had at least one foot in science throughout her academic and professional career. Throughout her interdisciplinary studies at the University of Toronto and Masters in Neuroscience at the University of Ottawa, Anu has sought to balance her curiosity of the natural world with other interests especially those that contribute to a systems approach to understanding problems. Her career as a public servant has provided many opportunities to contribute scientific perspectives, improve science and health literacy, and critically challenge traditional ways of thinking and doing, including strategic foresight and systems approaches. Her public service career has ranged from laboratory work on pathogens to strategic policy through various positions at Health Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Canadian Intellectual Property Office, and the Privy Council Office. She is currently the Senior Advisor on Research Excellence at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research where she works collaboratively across the research ecosystem to develop a holistic, inclusive and renewed concept of research excellence that meaningfully values equity, diversity and inclusion. She is also an active member of the Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network, Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada's Facilitation Network, and Canada School of Public Service Faculty. She is passionate about contributing to efforts to dismantle systemic racism and destigmatize mental health.

Meet the Host of Ask Me Anything



Samantha Moonsammy, Section Head, Lead Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion, Materiel Group, National Defence

Samantha 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 traveler 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 an "After the AMA – Team Session" with your immediate team for the day after the event for 30-60 minutes. 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.

MCs: Anu-Heidi Shukla-Jones and Samantha Moonsammy

Panelists: Charu Kaushic, Vidya ShankarNarayan, Anita Yengue and Jennifer Rice

AMA Team: Tara Lockhart, Terri-Ann Hurst, Natasha Lim, Jasmine Cousineau, Shelby Racine, Lyrique Richards, Terri Graham, Liliya Ishkaeva, Laura Raine, Kelly Brewer-Balch, Lamare Robinson, and Katherine Thompson