

## Spring 2023 Fellowship Roundtable

### Speaker Bio

#### **Keynote**



Carleitta L. Paige-Anderson  
National Science Foundation  
Program Director

Dr. Carleitta Paige-Anderson currently serves as Lead Program Director for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Undergraduate Program (HBCU-UP) in the Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM at the National Science Foundation (NSF). Her academic journey began at Virginia Union University (VUU), where she developed a passion for basic science research and earned a BS in Biology. After obtaining a PhD from Wake Forest University and completing a post-doctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins University, she returned to VUU. Over the years, she established a research program investigating biochemical signaling mechanisms in disease-causing bacteria and viruses. By leveraging her scientific expertise to integrate research into the academic curriculum, she was selected as a 2013-2014 Senior Fulbright Scholar in Surabaya, Indonesia at Universitas Airlangga. At VUU, she also served as the founding director of the VUU Center for Undergraduate Research, Dean of the University College, and Vice-President for Student Development and Success. Her collective efforts are rooted in enhancing the research and education capacities of HBCUs, a community she is excited to serve in her current role. Paige-Anderson attributes much of her success to the support of her family and friends.

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#### **Opening Remarks**



Dr. Laura Castillo-Page  
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine  
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer

Dr. Laura Castillo-Page is chief diversity and inclusion officer at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine where she leads the development of an overall diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy and set of programs for the entire organization. Prior to coming to the Academies, Castillo-Page most recently served as senior director for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Castillo-Page holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in educational administration and policy studies as well as an M.A. in political science from the University at Albany, SUNY, and holds a B.A. in political science and Latin American studies from Fordham University.

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#### **Panel: Moderator**



#### Zach Thomas

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine  
Director, Workforce Diversity, and Inclusion

Zach Thomas is the Director of Workforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

Zach recently served as the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for Cambium Assessment Inc. In this role, he provided strategic direction, thought leadership, and championed the development of an inclusive work environment by integrating DEI practice into all aspects of the business and research.

Zach is a seasoned diversity practitioner with more than 15 years of experience working in the higher education industry before transitioning to nonprofit and private sectors. Before joining CAI, he was diversity and inclusion program manager at American Institutes for Research, where he successfully managed the Employee Resource Groups and designed and launched a Reciprocal Mentoring Program to assist in diversifying the leadership pipeline, among other accomplishments.

Zach has a B.S. in health and M.Ed. in higher education administration, both from the University of Southern Mississippi. In addition, he has a certification in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace from the Muma College of Business at University of South Florida. He is also active in leadership roles with community and civic organizations.

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### Panelists



[Alexandra \(Alex\) Ghara](#)

[Robertson Foundation for Government \(RFG\)](#)

Vice President for Programs, Operations, and DEI

Alexandra Ghara is the Vice President for Programs, Operations and DEI at the Robertson Foundation for Government (RFG), where she oversees the administration of the Robertson Fellowship Program, directs grantmaking, programming and events, stakeholder relations, and initiatives for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Ghara has fifteen years of experience in program management, curriculum and training development, research design, grant administration, collaborative partnerships, and DEI initiatives. Prior to her current role, she served as the RFG Program Director in which she led the planning and implementation of professional development activities, alumni relations, and foundation events.

Before joining RFG in 2014, she worked in the Office of Equity, Diversity and Community Outreach at Louisiana State University developing and executing campus-wide and community-based initiatives aimed at promoting civic engagement, increasing cultural competency, and fostering relationships between campus and local community groups, activists, schools, and interfaith networks.

Ghara spent six years as a research and teaching assistant in the Political Science and African/African American Studies departments at LSU. Her research focused on the use of multidimensional measures of African American racial identity and its effects on political attitudes and policy preferences. She also explored the political effects of unconscious bias using implicit measures. Ghara received a Bachelor of Arts in African & African American Studies and a Master of Arts in Political Science from Louisiana State University. She is also a Certified Professional in Management designated by the American Management Association (AMA-CPM).

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Irene Hulede

American Society for Microbiology

Director of Education

Irene Hulede serves as Education Director for the American Society for Microbiology (ASM). She manages the development and implementation of educational products and programs for undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral scientists, educators and faculty in the microbiological sciences and/or biological sciences. In her role, she is responsible for the delivery of signature programs including (i) the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists (ABRCMS), a conference sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, (ii) ASM Conference for Undergraduate Educators (ASMCUE), a conference for microbiology and biology educators, (iii) professional development institutes and online learning for graduate students and early postdoctoral scientists, (iv) career outreach and student development programs and (v) ASM fellowship programs for trainees. Under her leadership, ASM Education and ABRCMS have been recognized with several honors, including a 2019 AIMBE Excellence in STEM Education award and a 2000 Presidential Award for Mentoring Underrepresented Minorities in Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology. With nearly a 30-year history of overseeing ASM meetings, fellowships, professional development and online learning, Hulede has managed a \$10M ABRCMS grant since 2000, a \$1M fellowship fund and education budget, and a \$3M agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She serves on a number of national external advisory committees of several organizations whose mission is to advance diversity initiatives in the STEM field. Prior to joining ASM, she held several positions at Bentley University, Student Affairs Division, where she led university wide student development programs. She was instrumental in launching diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at the university.

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Dr. Gisèle Muller-Parker  
Delaware State University  
Research Fellow

Dr. Gisèle Muller-Parker joined the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the Division of Graduate Education as Program Director for the Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) in October 2008. She served as lead Program Director of GRFP from 2010 until 2018. In 2018, she joined the Office of the Director, in the Office of Integrative Activities as Staff Associate with responsibilities in merit review, including Committees of Visitors and the Merit Review Report. She also served as the program officer for the NSF INCLUDES Coordination Hub before retiring from NSF in May 2019. Her current scholarly interests include study of the history of the GRFP with respect to changes in its policies and goals over its 71 year existence. She is a Research Fellow in the Department of History, Political Science and Philosophy, Delaware State University. Dr Muller-Parker holds degrees from SUNY at Stony Brook, the University of Delaware, and the University of California, Los Angeles. After postdoctoral appointments at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Maryland Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, she joined the Western Washington University faculty and was Professor of Biology from 1990 to 2010, and Assistant Director of Shannon Point Marine Center from 2006-2008.

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LaKesha N. Perry

National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

Physical Scientist/Academic Program Manager

International and Academic Affairs Office

Director's Office

LaKesha Perry is a Physical Scientist/Academic Program Manager in the Director's Office at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). LaKesha has over 25 years of scientific research experience working in Federal and Academic laboratories, including the Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She joined NIST in 2015 as an Engineering Technician with the Engineering Laboratory's Materials and Structural Systems Division. She was also elected President of her local section of the American Chemical Society (ACS) in 2022.

LaKesha's technical background is in Chemistry and Engineering. She received her Bachelor of Science in chemistry from Towson University. She is an expert in the analytical and forensic characterization of cementitious and polymeric materials using state-of-the-art laboratory equipment. LaKesha has assisted with the development and maintenance of new measurement tools and the operation of the Simulated Photodegradation via High Energy Radiant Emission (SPHERE) ultraviolet (UV) weathering device used for photodegradation studies on photovoltaic components. She has developed and published testing practices for hydration studies on multiple types of cement and minerals. LaKesha has also co-authored numerous scientific publications.

In LaKesha's current role, she is the Director of the NIST NRC Postdoctoral Research Associateship Program and the Graduate Student Measurement Science and Engineering (GMSE) Fellowship. She manages internship programs and opportunities for both graduate students and postdocs. LaKesha has won both ACS and NIST awards for her work in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion space and as an Outreach volunteer. Her passion in outreach focuses on promotion and advocacy for STEM representation and involvement for students and professionals of minority backgrounds. LaKesha believes in the One NIST Culture and promotes a diverse, equitable, and inclusive working environment.



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#### Group Discussion



Dr. Mary Byrne McDonnell

MBM Learning and Evaluation Strategies

Principal

Mary Byrne McDonnell, PhD founded MBM Learning and Evaluation Strategies to bring formative evaluative evidence to organizational and programmatic learning and improvement. In 2020, along with Ben Kerman, she began working with OSUN on evaluation planning and implementation for core programs. They will use this experience to develop frameworks for network-wide program learning and evaluation. Previously she worked with Atlantic Philanthropies coordinating and implementing Learning and Evaluation for their legacy Atlantic Fellows programs and the global network that ties them together. She captured their decade-long development in [Our Founding Story](#).

Over decades as an Executive at the Social Science Research Council Mary specialized in international capacity strengthening initiatives, serving as Senior VP for Strategic Learning until 2019.



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Julie Taylor

Institute of International Education

Director of Academic Relations, Fulbright

Julie Taylor serves as the Director of Academic Relations for Fulbright at the Institute of International Education. She represents the Fulbright Program externally, expanding partnerships with U.S. colleges and universities and academic associations. Prior to joining IIE, Julie was Senior Director of Research at American University's School of International Service where she supported seven grant-funded centers and headed the U.S. Summer Sisters Exchange Program, a U.S. government initiative that brings Pakistani high school girls to the U.S. for summer study.

Previously, as Director of Research at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, she helped double the school's external funding. She spent five years as a Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation focusing on the Middle East. Before RAND, Taylor was an assistant professor in the Near Eastern Studies Department at Princeton University. She served as a trustee for the American Institute for Iranian Studies and was a Strategic Studies Fellow at Harvard University's John M. Olin Center. Taylor has a Ph.D. in political science from UCLA and lived in the Middle East for five years.