

PATHWAYS PANELISTS

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Erin Hamner

Erin Hamner is a master's student at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) in the Geography and Environmental Systems department. Her research interests are watershed conservation and urban stormwater management. She is finishing her thesis on the impact of UMBC's stormwater management practices on local water quality. With this research, she has worked with UMBC's Office of Sustainability and undergraduate professors to pilot a student-led water monitoring program. She completed her bachelor's degree at UMBC after transferring from Anne Arundel Community College with an associate degree in Transfer Studies.



Kandis Boyd, PhD

Dr. Kandis Boyd has nearly 30 years of experience in environmental and atmospheric science, mentoring and advising students and early career professionals. A strategic leader, she has designed and managed initiatives to advance STEAM, with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

She served as Strategic Advisor for the NSF's Office of Equity and Civil Rights, driving agency-wide efforts to broaden participation in STEAM careers. As Deputy Division Director of NSF's Division of Grants and Agreements, she oversaw a \$5 billion budget and 12,000 grants annually.

Dr. Boyd began her career at NOAA, where her contributions included co-chairing NOAA's Environmental Modeling Strategic Plan and spearheading the "Turn Around Don't Drown" program. She's mentored over 50 students, authored three books, written 100+ articles, and hosted 30+ podcasts. An AMS Fellow, she received the 2021 Charles E. Anderson Award for her work in advancing diversity and inclusion.

She currently works with the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, which focuses on restoration efforts across a 64,000-square-mile watershed.



Erica Grow Cei

Erica Grow Cei is a Certified Broadcast Meteorologist and science communication specialist. Her 18-year TV career took her to WNBC in New York City, WUSA in Washington DC, and WPVI in Philadelphia. Now, Erica works behind the scenes as a Public Affairs specialist for NOAA's National Weather Service.

Erica is very active with the American Meteorological Society. She is the AMS's Commissioner on Professional Affairs, and she also served on AMS Council. In 2019, Erica was a delegate to the World Meteorological Organization's Congress, and her work with WMO continues today.

Erica received a Bachelor of Science in Meteorology from Penn State University, and in 2021, she was named an Alumni Fellow of her Alma Mater's College of Earth and Mineral Sciences.



**Aixa Alemán-Díaz,
PhD**

Dr. Aixa Alemán-Díaz is a Puerto Rican environmental social scientist dedicated to supporting marginalized communities and early-career scientists. Her research focuses on the impacts of inequality and climate change on coastal residents in Puerto Rico. At AGU, she leads grants and a professional development program for ocean and polar scientists centered on justice and equity. Her background includes work in nonprofits, federal agencies, higher education, and consulting, along with national fellowships such as the NOAA Sea Grant Knauss. Aixa is bilingual in Spanish and English, speaks Portuguese, and holds degrees from the University of Michigan, Rutgers University, and American University. In her free time, she enjoys dancing, hiking, and spending time with loved ones.

MENTORING PANELISTS

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Yaítza Luna-Cruz,
PhD

Dr. Yaítza Luna-Cruz is an atmospheric physicist with over 12 years of experience in research, operations, and program management, primarily with the DoD Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). As a subject matter expert in CBRNE transport and natural hazard modeling, she has supported 24/7 operations and research for federal and international agencies. She is currently a Program Executive at NASA's Earth Science Division, leading diversity and community engagement efforts and managing early career research programs.

Dr. Luna-Cruz holds a Ph.D. in atmospheric sciences from Howard University and B.Sc. & M.Sc. degrees from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. She is dedicated to outreach, mentorship, and "Science with Purpose" and is actively involved in leadership roles with AMS and PCAM.



Ava Marie

Ava Marie is a meteorologist at WBAL-TV in Baltimore, Maryland, with more than a decade of experience forecasting in the Mid-Atlantic. She is designated as a Certified Broadcast Meteorologist by the American Meteorological Society, and holds a Bachelor of Science in Atmospheric Science from the University of Kansas. Ava is also passionate about science education and attends many events in the community. Outside of work, Ava enjoys spending time outdoors with her husband, two kids and new puppy. You watch Ava's forecasts on "11 News Today" weekday mornings starting at 4:30 a.m.



**Taeilorae
Levell-Young**

Taeilorae Levell-Young works for CDM Smith as a consultant, her current client is DC Water, where she serves as the Outreach Manager for the Small Diameter Water Main Replacement Team, a program under Lead Free DC. Taeilorae has a background in Political Science and Arabic from Howard University, and she will receive her Master of Public Health in Environmental Health Sciences from the University of Maryland School of Public Health this December 2024.

Taeilorae has a deep passion for environmental and public health, water, stakeholder engagement, and community outreach. She recently organized and hosted the "Transforming Public Health: Voices of Women of Color in Leadership" event, which brought together 16 distinguished experts to discuss critical issues in Environmental Health & the Water Industry, Health Equity & Policy, Maternal and Child Health, and Community, Government & Communication to an audience of over 155 young professionals. Taeilorae's goal is to bring more understanding and awareness to the water industry's role as a vital part of public and environmental health. Through her work, she is committed to advancing health equity and fostering diverse leadership within the water sector.



Liz Gilden

Meteorologist by training (BS Penn State, MS Texas A&M), **Elizabeth (Liz) Gilden** currently works for AGU handling the mentoring and careers program. Previously, Elizabeth was a content specialist at the AMS in the Education department and has also worked at NSF as a Science Assistant in the Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences section. On the side Elizabeth runs a coaching business with Matt Hanson Racing, along side racing professionally as a triathlete.