



catalyst conversations: Hypotheses and Hashtags

Speaker Bios



Professor Heidi J. Larson is Director of The Vaccine Confidence Project and Professor of Anthropology, Risk and Decision Science at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; Clinical Professor, Department of Health Metrics Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle; Guest Professor, University of Antwerp and KU Leuven, Belgium, and Visiting Professor, Department of Medicine, National University of Singapore.

Prof. Larson previously headed Global Immunization Communication at UNICEF, chaired Gavi's Advocacy Task Force, and served on the WHO SAGE Working Group on vaccine hesitancy.

She is author of *STUCK: How Vaccine Rumors Start – and Why They Don't Go Away* (Oxford University Press, 2020) and has published widely and lectured internationally on the drivers and enablers of vaccine confidence. She was awarded the 2021 Edinburgh Medal in recognition of her scientific work on the contagion of misinformation and its impact on human health.



Ijad Madisch is co-founder and CEO of ResearchGate, the professional network for researchers. He earned his doctorate in the field of virology, while also studying computer science on the side. Ijad spent several years working as a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, focusing on tissue engineering and radiology. He founded ResearchGate in 2008, together with fellow physician Sören Hofmayer and computer scientist Horst Fickenscher. Ijad is a member of the selection committee for the Breakthrough Prize Junior Challenge, and was a member of the Digital Council of the Cabinet of Germany from 2018 to 2021, advising the government on the country's digitalization strategy.



Raven Baxter, Ph.D., aka **Dr. Raven the Science Maven**, is an internationally acclaimed American educator and molecular biologist known for effortlessly merging science with pop culture. Using her magnetic personality, she challenges the status quo to prove that science communicators aren't all one and the same.

Raised by a single mother in North Carolina and New York, Dr. Baxter's curiosity to explore the world around her at a young age

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developed into a lifelong affinity for science. Today, whether producing viral hip-hop videos such as her “Antibodyody Antibody Song” or her “Wipe it Down” to teach science lessons to the masses or hosting a STEM-themed talk show she created called STEMbassy, she joyfully disrupts traditional cultural perceptions about scientists.

Passionate about diversity in STEM, Dr. Baxter builds community with her participation in the Black in Science Communication group and recognizes the importance of service as a legacy member of the prestigious Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, which counts Vice President Kamala Harris and civil rights activist Rosa Parks as distinguished members.

As an entrepreneur—and unapologetic fashionista—Dr. Baxter recognized the importance of inclusive fashions for science fans from all walks of life, which led her to found her own online store, Smarty Pants. Her shop features of-the-moment, whimsical STEM-themed apparel and accessories designed by her with a portion of the profits benefiting STEM students.

In addition, Dr. Baxter is a sought after public speaker who maintains a strong voice in science academia as the Director of Diversity Initiatives in the UC Irvine School of Biological Sciences. She has earned numerous awards for her achievements, including the State University of New York’s Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence in honor of her service in educating the public about COVID-19, and recognition on Fortune Magazine’s 40 Under 40 list.

For the upcoming 2021/2022 school year, Dr. Baxter will join a 4-person team of celebrities and influencers commissioned by NASA to inspire student participation in the NASA TechRise Student Challenge. The team will create a video that challenges students in grades 6 – 12 to build and test a design based on Dr. Baxter’s hypothesis about what a maraca would sound like in microgravity, during the NASA TechRise Virtual Field Trip in September.



Sara Yussefi is the global Head of Communications for the Life Science business of Merck, KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany. In this role, she is responsible for internal communication for its 22,000 Life Science employees, as well as for external communication, brand strategy, and creative services.

Yussefi joined the company in 2015 as the Head of Global Brand and Marketing Communications for the Consumer Health business. During her tenure, Yussefi moved through the organization taking on a number of global roles with increased responsibility, including serving as a strategic advisor and leading communications for the Healthcare’s commercial operations and global franchises, with responsibility for internal and external communications, executive positioning, traditional and social media, as well as thought leadership platforms.

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David Sun Kong, Ph.D., is a synthetic biologist, community organizer, musician, and photographer based in Lexington, MA. He is the director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab's new [Community Biotechnology Initiative](#), a pioneer in developing microfluidic, or "lab-on-a-chip" technologies for synthetic biology, and a leader in the global Community Bio movement.

In 2017, he founded the Global Community Bio Summit, a gathering convening the global network of community biology labs, and was recognized as an emerging leader in synthetic biology as a "LEAP" Fellow. He is co-founder of 'How To Grow (Almost) Anything,' an international course on synthetic biology taught with Professor George Church of Harvard, and founder of 'Metafluidics,' an open repository for fluidic systems.

David conducted his graduate studies at MIT's Media Lab, receiving a master's degree for developing technology for printing nanostructures with energetic beams and a Ph.D. for demonstrating the first gene synthesis in a microfluidic system. His research has been covered via outlets such as the Washington Post, Science, the Boston Globe, Gizmodo, and STAT News.

He has also performed as a DJ, beat-boxer, vocalist, and rapper at hundreds of venues, and his photography has been exhibited at the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian and other museums and galleries across the country.