



BDR Diversity
Working
Group



Mirai Alliance

Women in Life Sciences

Mentorship Program

女性自然科学者メンターシッププログラム



Date: 2025/11/17

Time: 9:30 - 16:30

Avenue: RIKEN BDR Building C
1F Auditorium

場所：発生・再生研究棟C棟
オーディトリアム

対象者：女性の研究系職員（研究員、テクニカルスタッフ、修士課程学生、博士課程学生、ポスドク、若手研究者）



What is Mirai Alliance?

The Mirai Alliance is a mentorship network for women researchers in life sciences, launched by the BDR Diversity Working Group with support from the RIKEN Diversity Acceleration Fund. It connects early-career researchers with established women scientists, offering space for open conversation about research careers, work-life balance, and leadership. Through mentorship, community, and shared experience, Mirai Alliance supports women to grow with confidence and build sustainable, fulfilling scientific careers.

Program Aims

- Build **connections** between generations of women scientists.
 - Encourage **open discussion** on challenges and opportunities in research careers.
 - Provide **mentorship and resources** to navigate key career transitions.
 - Promote **leadership, resilience, and visibility** of women in science.
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- 世代を超えて女性研究者同士のつながりを築く。
 - 研究キャリアにおける課題や機会について、率直に意見を交わす場をつくる。
 - キャリアの転機を乗り越えるためのメンタリングとリソースを提供する。
 - 女性研究者のリーダーシップ、レジリエンス（しなやかさ）、および可視性を高める。

Kick-off Symposium

Time	Session	Speakers & Details
09:30–09:35	Opening Remarks	Li-Kun Phng
09:35–11:05	SESSION 1	
09:35–10:05	Keynote Lecture: Beyond Role Models: Playing Your Own Role	Mineko Kengaku
10:05–10:20	Where to stand on a jungle gym	Ai Niitsu
10:20–10:35	The Journey to Independence: Building Vision, Identity and Network	Aiko Sada
10:35–11:05	Q&A／質疑応答 Anonymous questions welcome (英語・日本語). Scan QR code.	All Session-1 speakers.
11:15–13:45	MENTOR–MENTEE DISCUSSIONS & LUNCH／交流と昼食	Speed networking (Parts 1–4, 30 min each). Lunch during Part 2.
14:00–15:30	SESSION 2	—
14:00–14:15	The Benefits and Challenges of Scientific Mobility	Li-Kun Phng
14:15–14:30	Finding Confidence Beyond the Lab Bench: Lessons from Failure, Bias, and Belonging	Yumi Konagaya
14:30–14:45	Paths That Opened Through People and Persistence	Chisako Sakuma
14:45–15:00	Between Lab and Life: Seeking Balance in Science and Career	Naoko Satoh-Takayama
15:00–15:30	Q&A／質疑応答 Anonymous questions welcome (英語・日本語). Scan QR code.	All Session-2 speakers.
15:30–15:45	Closing Remarks	Yu-Chiun Wang



Scan for anonymous
Q&A session

Meet the mentors



NAOKO SATOH-TAKAYAMA
RIKEN, IMS



CHISAKO SAKUMA
RIKEN, BDR



YUMI KONAGAYA
RIKEN, BDR



AIKO SADA
KYUSHU UNIVERSITY



LI-KUN PHNG
RIKEN, BDR



MINEKO KENGAKU
ICEMS, KYOTO UNIVERSITY



AI NIITSU
RIKEN, IMS



AYA TAKEOKA
RIKEN, CBS



MIKI EBISUYA
TU DRESDEN POL



HIROMI YANAGISAWA
TSUKUBA UNIVERSITY



FUMI KUBO
RIKEN, CBS



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https://www.riken.jp/en/research/labs/ecl/precis_immune_reg_riken_ecl/index.html

How do you manage work-related stress?

To manage work-related stress, I like to spend relaxing time with my family, often visiting a Japanese-style public bath (super sento). Enjoying meals together or having a drink with my husband helps me unwind and refresh my mind.

Fun fact about yourself

A fun fact about me is that I was four months pregnant when I started my position at RIKEN. It was both an exciting and memorable beginning to my career there.

Naoko Satoh-Takayama

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

ECL Unit leader (IMS) | 2024 - current | RIKEN

I study immune regulation and disease mechanisms in mucosal immunity.

ECL Unit Leader | RIKEN | 2024 - present

Public Relations Committee | Yokohama City University | 2025 - present

Reviewer | Japanese Society for Mucosal Immunology | 2025 - present

Associate Editor | Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences | 2023 - present

EDUCATION

PhD | Graduate School, The University of Tokyo Specialized in mucosal immunology.

What expertise can you provide?

I find it difficult to identify a particular area of expertise, as I believe I still need to grow in all of these areas. I hope to learn and grow together with mentees by sharing my experiences and learning alongside the way.

What is your research area?

Mucosal immunology, immune homeostasis, inflammation, disease regulation

What stage of career are you at?

While I am still in the early stage of my research career, in terms of age and experience I may be closer to mid-career. Life events such as childbirth have shaped my career path in a unique way, leading to a slightly slower.

What sectors have you worked in?

My research career has been entirely within research institutes, including inter-university.



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<https://www.bdr.riken.jp/ja/research/labs/sakuma-c/index.html>

Chisako Sakuma

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

ECL Team Leader | 2025 - current | RIKEN

Using mosquitoes, we investigate neural and physiological mechanisms connecting feeding, metabolism, and reproduction.

Senior Scientist | 2024 - 2025 | RIKEN BDR

Research Scientist | 2022 - 2024 | RIKEN BDR

Lecturer / Assistant Professor | 2015 – 2022 | Jikei University, School of Medicine

EDUCATION

PhD, MSc, BSc | School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Tokyo

Visiting Student | Department of Biology, Queen's University, Canada

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation
Grant Writing

How do you manage work-related stress?

Spending time with my family—especially with my children—allows me to completely disconnect from work for a while and reset my mind. At the same time, parenting itself comes with constant challenges, so immersing myself in research helps me relieve the stress that comes from that side as well.

Fun fact about yourself

I love eating! I think my passion for food and the joy of sharing meals have been one of my biggest sources of motivation in many aspects of my life.

What is your research area?

Neuroscience, blood-feeding behavior, mosquito physiology, reproduction

What stage of career are you at?

I consider myself a mid-career researcher. I have just started my own lab as a PI, and I am now in the process of recruiting members to join my team. I am eager to fully develop and expand the original research ideas that I have been aspiring to pursue.

What sectors have you worked in?

I have always been in academia and have never worked in other sectors. However, my husband is a researcher in industry, so through him I have some, though limited, understanding of how research is conducted in the private sector.



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<https://sites.google.com/view/yumi-konagaya-lab-en/home?authuser=0>



X @YumiKonagaya

How do you manage work-related stress?

Relax at home and spending time with family and friends.

Fun fact about yourself

I tend to speak a little too fast - that's my Osaka accent showing!

Yumi Konagaya

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2024 - current | RIKEN BDR

My lab aims to quantitatively understand how cell proliferation is tightly regulated during intestinal epithelial stem cell differentiation to maintain tissue homeostasis.

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2020 - 2023 | Weill Cornell Medicine, USA

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2019 - 2020 | Stanford University, USA

EDUCATION

PhD | 2019 | Graduate School of Biostudies, Kyoto University

Supervisor: Prof. Michiyuki Matsuda

Project: Development of FRET-based reporter of AMPK transgenic mouse reveals tissue- and cell-type specific activation of AMPK in vivo.

BSc | 2014 | Department of Biological Sciences, Kyoto University

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation

Publishing

Writing CV

What is your research area?

My current research focuses on understanding cell fate decisions in the intestinal epithelium using quantitative biology approaches.

What stage of career are you at?

Early-career

What sectors have you worked in?

I have worked exclusively in academia.



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How do you manage work-related stress?

Spending time with family, maintaining sleep & health, and having supportive colleagues.

Fun fact about yourself

Fell asleep in lab meetings when I was a student, but I still made it in academia 😊 .

Aiko Sada

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor | Medical Institute of Bioregulation, Kyushu University | 2023 - present

Epidermal stem cell dynamics in skin regeneration and aging

Associate professor | IRCMS, Kumamoto university | 2019 - 2023

Assistant professor | TARA, University of Tsukuba | 2016 - 2019

Postdoctoral fellow | Cornell University, USA | 2011 – 2016

EDUCATION

PhD | 2011 | The Graduate University For Advanced Studies (Sokendai)

Supervisor: Dr. Yumiko saga

BSc | 2006 | Shizuoka university

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation

Writing CVs

Grant writing

Networking

What is your research focus?

Cellular and molecular mechanisms of skin regeneration and aging.

What stage of career are you at?

Mid-career

What sectors have you worked in?

Academia only



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What expertise can you provide?

- Oral presentation
- Publishing
- Writing CV
- Working abroad
- Networking

How do you manage work-related stress?

Moms' night out, a drink after work, boxing (works without fail!).

Fun fact about yourself

I have studied or worked in 8 countries but only mastered 1 language 😞.

Li-Kun Phng

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2016 - current | RIKEN CDB/BDR

My lab unravels the cellular and mechanical principles of how blood vessels are formed into well-patterned networks.

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2014 - 2016 | National Cerebral & Cardiovascular Research Center, Osaka

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2011 - 2014 | VIB & KU Leuven, Belgium

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2009 – 2011 | EMBL Heidelberg, Germany

Visiting Scientist | 2009 | Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, Germany

EDUCATION

PhD | 2009 | University College London, England

Supervisor: Dr. Holger Gerhardt

Thesis: Notch signalling in developmental angiogenesis

MSc by Research in Life Sciences | 2004 | University of Edinburgh, Scotland

BSc in Pharmacology with Study in Industry | 2002 | University of Bristol, England

What is your research area?

Endothelial cell mechanobiology, vascular patterning, tubulogenesis, tissue morphogenesis, zebrafish.

What stage of career are you at?

Mid-career.

What sectors have you worked in?

Academia and 1 year in Novartis (Basel, Switzerland) as an internship student.



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How do you manage work-related stress?

Wearing favourite clothes, watching sports, cooking and eating, traveling

Mineko Kengaku

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor | iCeMS, Kyoto University | 2017 - Present

Professor | iCeMS | 2012 - 2017

Assistant Professor | iCeMS | 2008 - 2012

Team Leader | RIKEN | 2004 - 2008

Lecturer | Kyoto University | 2002 – 2003

Assistant Professor | Kyoto University | 1997 -2001

Postdoctoral Research Fellow | Harvard Medical School, USA | 1995 – 1997

Cliff Tabin Lab

EDUCATION

PhD | 1995 | University of Tokyo

MSc | 1991 | University of Tokyo

BSc | 1989 | University of Tokyo

What expertise can you provide?

Grant writing

Writing CV

Oral presentations

What is your research area?

cell motility during brain development

What stage of career are you at?

senior (starting second career after kids)

What sectors have you worked in?

academia only



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<https://www.bdr.riken.jp/en/research/labs/niitsu-a/index.html>

How do you manage work-related stress?

Weekend getaway to the countryside.

Fun fact about yourself

Anything folded (knitting, origami, and proteins) attracts me!

Ai Niitsu

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2025 - current | RIKEN, BDR

We design membrane proteins to study sequence–structure–function relationships and mechanisms of signal transduction.

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2021 – 2022 | RIKEN, JSPS

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2017 – 2021 | RIKEN, CBD

Special Postdoctoral Researcher | 2016 – 2017 | RIKEN Center for Life Systems Science

Postdoctoral Fellow | University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Postdoctoral Fellow | RIKEN, Japan

EDUCATION

PhD | University of Tokyo, Japan

What expertise can you provide?

Oral presentation
Writing CVs
Grant writing
Publishing
Going abroad

What is your research focus?

Cellular and molecular mechanisms of skin regeneration and aging.

What stage of career are you at?

I'd say early-career.

What sectors have you worked in?

Academia only



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How do you manage work-related stress?

Wine 😊 . I picked up salsa dancing when I was a PhD student at UCLA, and that love remained one of the important things that helped me unwind for years. Now that I am a solo parent of a 2-year-old girl, I do not get as much personal time, but I unwind by reading books to her and cuddling her. And did I mention wine? 😊

Fun fact about yourself:

I once set a goal to learn something new every month, so I have tried everything from beginner watercolor painting to making fresh pasta. I have not been great at any of them yet, but I love exploring new skills and hobbies.

Aya Takeoka

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Team Director | 2024 – present | RIKEN, CBS

Focuses on **neural circuit mechanisms of motor control**, aiming to define spinal circuit logic and translate discoveries toward recovery after stroke or spinal cord injury.

Principal Investigator | 2016 – 2024 | NERF, VIB / KU Leuven, Belgium

Postdoctoral Fellow | 2010 – 2016 | FMI, Basel, Switzerland

EDUCATION

PhD | 2004 – 2010 | University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), USA

B.A. | 1999 – 2003 | Neuroscience (High Honors), Oberlin College, USA

What expertise can you provide?

Writing CVs
Grant writing
Publishing
Oral presentation
Leadership

What is your research focus?

Neural circuit mechanisms underlying motor control, including how spinal neurons select, execute, and link elemental movements, and how circuits adapt during recovery after injury.

What stage of career are you at?

Mid-career

What sectors have you worked in?

I have always been in academia and never worked in other sectors.



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<https://physics-of-life.tu-dresden.de/team/pol-groups/ebisuya>



X

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How do you manage work-related stress?

Taking a long bath, going for a walk while listening to an audiobook, buying lots of manga at once.

Fun fact about yourself:

I do Radio Taiso exercise every morning – it's the only exercise I can remember.

Miki Ebisuya

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Professor / Chair of Cell & Tissue Control | 2023–present | Physics of Life, TU Dresden, Germany

Quantitative cross-species comparison using the stem cell zoo.

Group Leader | 2018 – 2023 | EMBL Barcelona, Spain

Unit Leader | 2013 – 2019 | RIKEN, CDB

Group Leader, Career-Path Promotion Unit | 2009 – 2013 | Kyoto University, Japan

JSPS Research Fellow | 2005 – 2008 | JSPS

EDUCATION

PhD | Kyoto University, Japan

What expertise can you provide?

Grant writing
(Chalk Talks)

What is your research focus?

Cross-species comparative developmental biology using pluripotent stem cells (“stem cell zoo”) to dissect how species-specific developmental tempos and morphologies emerge from shared cellular and molecular principles.

What stage of career are you at?

Mid-career/Senior

What sectors have you worked in?

Academia only



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<https://www.facebook.com/hiromiyanagisawalab/>

What stage of career are you at?

Senior

What sectors have you worked in?

only in academia

How do you manage work-related stress?

Talking to spouse, cooking for my family, exercise, traveling, eating good foods

Fun fact about yourself:

I have a special talent for forgetting things when I travel. One time, I left my boarding pass at the kiosk and got called out at the airport.

Hiromi Yanagisawa

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director & Professor | 2024 – present | TARA, University of Tsukuba

We aim to elucidate the molecular mechanism underlying extracellular matrix-related diseases.

Professor | 2015 – present | TARA Center, University of Tsukuba

Associate Professor (Tenured) | 2011 – 2015 | UTSW, USA

Assistant Professor / PI | 2003 – 2011 | UTSW, USA

Instructor | 1999 – 2003 | UTSW, USA

Postdoctoral Researcher | 1991 – 1999 | UTSW, USA

Clinical Doctor (Internal Medicine Resident) | 1986 – 1991 | University of Tsukuba Hospital

EDUCATION

PhD | Medical Sciences | 1993 | University of Tsukuba

M.D. | 1986 | University of Tsukuba

What expertise can you provide?

grant writing

Publishing

writing CV

Networking

oral presentation

working abroad

leadership

What is your research focus?

Molecular mechanisms of extracellular matrix (ECM)-related diseases, including how ECM components regulate tissue structure, vascular integrity, and disease progression.



Alliance & Support

ミライアライアンスの今後と支援



Slack Community スラックコミュニティ

- Join our private Slack workspace to stay connected.
- Share resources, questions, and opportunities.
- Celebrate achievements and exchange advice.



Slack Channel



Quarterly Mentorship Zoom Sessions 定期オンラインセッション

- 4 times a year with guest speakers and peer discussions.
- Topics: career strategy, leadership, communication.
- Hybrid or virtual participation welcomed.
- **Zoom link to be shared later.**



Contact & Support お問い合わせ・サポート

- Organized by BDR Diversity Working Group.
- Contact: **bdr_diversity_po@ml.riken.jp**
- Follow-up announcements via email & Slack.

**Connecting women in science to build
a brighter future together**

「科学で未来をつなぐ女性たちへ」

