

MEDIA AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The value of scientific accomplishment can be multiplied exponentially with effective and accurate communication. Providing news of the latest scientific developments, and a corresponding understanding of their implications, is an important part of informing the public about some of the most important issues of the day and gaining their support for rational policymaking. AAAS offers an Annual Meeting that is highly accessible to the press and to the public, plus a variety of events designed to engage people of all ages and interests. Also

important to the AAAS goal of promoting the accurate and effective communication of science is a range of programs intended to reach journalists across the country and around the world.

2013 AAAS ANNUAL MEETING

The world's largest general scientific conference brought nearly 10,000 scientists, engineers, policy-makers, educators, journalists, and students to Boston in 2013. Amid the announcement of a huge range of scientific discoveries with equally wide-ranging impacts, a dominant theme emerged. Scientific research and development, although requiring patient

investment by industry and government, yields a high rate of social and economic return.

In remarks made to some of the nearly 1,000 newsroom registrants present at the meeting, noted researcher and outgoing AAAS President William H. Press called the scientific enterprise "the greatest mechanism ever invented to turn human creativity into economic benefits."

William H. Press, 2013 AAAS President, told attendees at the AAAS Annual Meeting that future economic success depends on government investment in scientific research and development.





At Family Science Days, a boy proved that science is fun as he observed a strawberry DNA extraction, seen in the thin white layer between the strawberry layer and the clear layer.

At right, photographer Michael Benson spoke in front of his “Planetfall” planetary landscapes, which were displayed in the AAAS Art Gallery.



Press warned, however, that sustained government funding for basic research is required to capture those benefits.

The 5,400 general participants in the meeting attended sessions about an innovative effort to help stroke patients regain speech, the latest assessment of the potential for life on Mars, and the brain similarities between humans and chimps. More than 3,600 children and their family members attended the meeting’s popular Family Science Days, where they were able to paint with glowing bacteria, build a solar cell using blackberries, drive an underwater robot, and meet engaging scientists and engineers.

A daylong seminar called Communicating Science brought scientists and top journalists together to discuss effective use of print, broadcast, and online media, as well as offering a session in communicating science to policy-makers. The seminar looked at the growing role of social media in scientific communication, outlining the ways that researchers can use social media to engage the public.

EUREKALERT! SEMINAR: BEYOND PRINT COMMUNICATION

At a National Press Club seminar organized by EurekAlert!, the science-news service of AAAS, top journalists focused on the crucial role of online and social media platforms in the communication of developments in the

world of science. The event was part of EurekAlert’s broader effort to promote accurate communication of science globally.

Speaking to 175 public information officers (PIOs) and other attendees from across the United States, the journalists discussed the increasing importance of social media, which Robert Lee Hotz, science writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, referred to as a “spectacular opportunity” to communicate to a broad audience.

Reporters at the event emphasized that the speed of modern communication heightens the pressure on PIOs to maintain journalistic standards, said *Science* Press Package Director Meagan Phelan, “specifically, to get facts straight and avoid hyperbole when they are promoting their institutions’ news.”

REACHING REPORTERS GLOBALLY

The AAAS Office of Public Programs organized its first-ever press conference in Shanghai in 2013. Joy Ma of EurekAlert! Chinese handled the opening remarks and introductions for a briefing focused on the first high-resolution view of two co-receptors that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) uses to attack the immune system. Reporters from leading Chinese media outlets attended.

The briefing was one of 12 international, multilingual press conferences organized by AAAS in 2013, including in Zurich, Tokyo,



and Leuven, Belgium.

Other activities designed to communicate to the global community of journalists included ongoing media outreach to EurekAlert! registrants, 50% of which are outside of the United States, and a round of AAAS-EurekAlert! Fellowships for International Science Reporters awarded to journalists from leading publications in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Peru.

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION WORKSHOPS

Scientists and engineers are essential to the communication of science, but they may need to develop those skills. Scientists who participate in the AAAS Communicating Science workshops have the opportunity to define their audiences, develop their key messages, and practice giving short presentations. The workshops help them to become better communicators so that they can engage in a variety of public and professional interactions, including public presentations, media interviews, and productive exchanges via social media.

In 2013 the program provided nine workshops and two talks, reaching 276 scientists and engineers. Since its inception, the program has held 39 workshops for 1,924 scientists and engineers, and has offered 36 talks that have reached an additional 1,000.

In 2013, AAAS had the opportunity to work with scientists from the University of

Maryland in a series of four workshops—resulting in the strengthening of a community of peers engaged in science communication. With support from the AAAS workshop and the university, the scientists were able to produce high-quality video, public websites, and social media accounts.

SENIOR SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS

Connecting students and teachers to real science, and real scientists, is one of the most effective ways to improve science education, according to Shirley Malcom, director of AAAS Education and Human Resources and the former co-chair of the National Science Board Commission on 21st Century Education on STEM. With the goal of creating such connections, AAAS continued to sponsor the popular Senior Scientists and Engineers volunteer program, which put 70 retired scientists, engineers, and physicians in public school classrooms in Maryland and Virginia. Retired scientists are often “an untapped source of talent and potential,” Malcom said.

Thanks to a generous donation from a AAAS Fellow, the program will become the model for a nationwide network called the AAAS National STEM Volunteer Program. A pilot of the expanded effort will be launched in 2014 with a series of seed grants for AAAS members to partner with non-profits in their communities to bring scientists and engineers into local classrooms.

Above left, panelists took part in a “Communicating Science to Policy-Makers” session at the 2013 AAAS Annual Meeting.

Above right, AAAS staffers Sarah Ingraffea and Kavita Berger manned the jelly bean table at the White House Easter Egg Roll. The two explained that it takes about 30 seconds of aerobic activity to burn four calories, and they led kids in jumping jacks before doling out the candy.