

Engaging the Public in Science and Technology

While many people view science in a positive light, much remains to be done to engage the public in the exciting world of science and engineering.

In 2002, AAAS worked to forge closer links between scientists and members of the general population, while respecting different points of view—even when they were not those shared by many scientists and engineers.

To help further this relationship between science and society, the AAAS is planning a new Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology. This center will include our expanding educational programs, but will also provide a forum for critical dialogue between the public and the world of science.

Providing a Forum for Scientists >>> In the 21st century, science stories often land on the front pages of the world's major newspapers—from stem cell research and bioterrorism, to the safety of space travel, global warming, and funding for the nation's scientific enterprise. Events organized by AAAS in 2002 gave rise to news accounts of new scientific findings, as well as reports on the scientific community's response to current events. The AAAS 2002 Annual Meeting in Boston, for example, attracted 5,000 people, including almost 1,000 journalists from around the world.

During the Annual Meeting, and at other events throughout the year, renowned scientists and policy leaders chose AAAS as a forum for disseminating their ideas. Former World Bank official Ismail Serageldin, former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders, geneticist Claire Fraser, U.K. Science Advisor Sir David King, economist Jeffrey Sachs, Alzheimer's researcher Rudolph Tanzi, and Leon Kass, chairman of U.S. President Bush's Council on Bioethics, were among the scientists and policymakers to speak at AAAS events in 2002. Some speakers challenged scientists to stimulate the public's interest in their work; others reported on their latest research findings, or addressed science policy from a unique perspective.

Helping Scientists, Engineers Hone News Skills >>> The growing complexity of the world of science and technology has required ever-greater sophistication on the part of the journalists who must write and edit news stories. Their job is not only to translate research findings into language the public understands, but to research the scientific merit of a proposed topic for a news story.

In 2002, AAAS sent 25 enthusiastic interns—scientists and engineers—to media outlets throughout the United States, so that they could sharpen their ability to communicate complex scientific information. In return, the interns also guided other journalists with less training in the sciences, and the articles that the interns wrote brought new perspectives to local science coverage. More than 400 interns have participated in the program: Today, half of them remain in the sciences, the others have gone on to careers in science communications.

Science on the Radio >>> Every week, since the first spot aired in January 1988, AAAS's "Science Update," an award-winning radio program (click on www.scienceupdate.org), has brought compelling science news and information to communities throughout the United States, with 90-second radio spots that are based on either the release of research findings, or on questions posed by listeners.



In May 2002, for example, episodes featured research that proposed ways to increase agricultural yields, to send threatening asteroids off course, to relieve headaches, and to use airplane boarding passes to detect bombs. In 2002, the spots aired daily on 55 radio stations, and twice a week on another 350 stations.





"The Congressional Fellows get to see how Congress works, and we get the benefit of their expertise and their fresh perspective."

DAVID GOLDSTON, Chief of Staff,
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Science



"We wanted objectivity and a high-quality peer review process, and our experience with AAAS is that they can deliver these things."

KERRI-ANN JONES, director, NSF Office of International
Science and Engineering and former executive director,
Maine Research Capacity Committee

