Engaging the public in the advances of science is fundamental to a well-informed citizenry and support for the scientific enterprise. In 2010, AAAS helped convey clear, accessible messages about science through a range of activities, including an Annual Meeting that appealed to an extremely broad audience, communication workshops for scientists and engineers and programs for science journalists.

AAAS Annual Meeting
The AAAS Annual Meeting, the largest general scientific conference in the world, offered exciting presentations by prominent researchers and U.S. leaders in science policy—as well as kid-friendly demonstrations designed to spark wonder in future generations of scientists.

Under the banner of “Bridging Science and Society,” top researchers explained how their advances impact care for the elderly, public security and other facets of everyday life as well as global challenges such as climate change and disease. U.S. and international science journalists attended two-dozen special briefings, and scientists and engineers got a chance to hone their skills in science communication. Thousands of people attended two Family Science Days and other free public events.

AAAS Board Chair Peter Agre (2010-2011) said the meeting’s theme of public engagement called on scientists and engineers to “make their work both beneficial and understandable, and on society to discover again the excitement and hope that research and its findings offer.”

During the meeting, the San Diego Union Tribune published a series of three editorials by AAAS authors and others on urgent science-related issues.

Communicating Science Broadly
The American public is interested in science and admires scientists, according to national polling, but too often a wide communication gap exists between researchers and general audiences. To help close that gap and bring the discoveries and expertise of science directly to citizens, the AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology offers tools to researchers to help them learn how to talk to people who have not had extensive science training.

Online resources at www.aaas.org/communicatingscience encourage researchers to develop their own communication tools. Workshops allow science and engineering professionals to practice the skills of crafting a message and delivering it in a relaxed learning environment. In 2010, AAAS trained 546 scientists and engineers at six communication workshops.

AAAS has furthered its commitment to broad communication of science through its Committee on Science and Technology Engagement with the Public, collaboration with science museums and other science organizations that reach out to public audiences, and the publication of a book chapter, entitled “Science Communication for All,” by AAAS Public Engagement Manager Tiffany Lohwater, in Science Education Leadership: Best Practices for the New Century.

New Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers
While traditional rewards in the science community often overlook contributions to science communication, the AAAS Early Career Award for Public Engagement with Science aims to encourage interactive dialogue between scientists and non-scientific audiences. The dialogue might take the form of informal science education, media communication, science cafés, fairs, exhibits or social media, to name some possibilities.

Donors Bob and Margee Hazen say they helped establish the award because they recognize the increasing importance of communication about issues such as evolution, global climate change, stem cell research and neuroscience.

“The award will highlight successful examples of public engagement and create models for other scientists and en-
“Engineers,” said Bob Hazen, a research scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science and a professor at George Mason University.

Many additional donors have since stepped forward, including AAAS CEO and Science Executive Publisher Alan Leshner and his wife Agnes; Science Editor-in-Chief Bruce Alberts and his wife Betty; and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. In addition, the Noyce Foundation has contributed support for a video that highlights public engagement opportunities for scientists.

Science, Religion and Bridges

Encouraging constructive conversation between scientists and religious groups is part of a longstanding goal at AAAS.

With NASA astrophysicist Jennifer Wiseman as its new director, the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion partnered with the AAAS Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology in hosting an event featuring sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund, who told her audience that the true nature of what scientists think about religion is more complex than generally thought.

At a panel discussion, entitled “Re-Envisioning the Science and Religion Dialogue,” AAAS CEO Leshner said, “With continuing battles over the teaching of evolution in the schools and new fundamentalist attacks on the reliability of climate science, there is a need more than ever for a constructive conversation.”

Leshner also spoke out on this topic in a number of editorials on the Huffington Post. His op-ed posts applauded constructive science-religion dialogue and science museums that present scientific evidence and the process of science in non-polarizing ways.

Divisions Focus on Haiti and More

An initiative organized by the AAAS Caribbean Division brought together scientists, science policy experts and educators to explore how collaborative efforts to build Haitian science capacity could help the nation rebuild after its shattering earthquake—and strengthen its long-term economic development.

“We believe that the advancement of Haitian science and science education, with international assistance and support, is a key element in the future sustainable development of Haiti and the well-being of its people,” said Jorge Colón, president of the AAAS Caribbean Division.

The four regional divisions of AAAS—Caribbean, Pacific, Arctic, and Southwest and Rocky Mountain—organize meetings for scientists on regional issues and promote publications by scientists from within the division. The 2010 Caribbean Division meeting also explored new research on the causes of alcoholism, gender differences in addictive behavior, and honey bees’ memory and learning.

Teacher and student workshops offered interesting glimpses into the world of neurobiology.

At the AAAS Arctic Division meeting, discussion focused on the environmental science of Arctic habitats and health disparities in Arctic residents, among other topics.

Presentations on wolves, wildlife forensics and watersheds constituted the main body of the AAAS Pacific Division meeting. The AAAS Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division meeting in Houston explored the latest advances in biomedical research, nanotechnology and synthetic biology.

Mass Media Fellows

In 2010, the AAAS Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellows program placed 12 science, engineering and math students in internships at media outlets from National Public Radio and the Chicago Tribune to Scientific American. Minority Science Writers Internships provided hands-on training to two students in the newsroom of the journal Science, thereby supporting the highest-quality science journalism.

Family Science Days offered fun, hands-on activities and Meet the Scientists opportunities during the AAAS Annual Meeting. The 2010 event drew nearly 2,000 attendees.