NATIONAL POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION

Communicating Your Science: Enhancing Science Public Relations

Communication is now more than ever vital to enhancing scientific outreach with the public. Learning how to break down our work into a message that accurately portrays the science and is understandable to the average person is a necessary and important skill. Communicating science, especially with the public, now includes using your voice on digital media outlets to advocate for science, dispel false science, and promote trust. The scrutiny of the media and elected officials on hot button topics such as climate change and stem cell research has highlighted how easily the translation of scientific jargon to everyday language can muddle the message, leading to questioning the legitimacy and necessity of it all. Sharing our knowledge and excitement for research can generate more curiosity and support. More importantly, if we make the effort to better inform the public about the implications of our research they will have the information needed to make better policy decisions on the future of research.

The devil is in the details, and as scientists we specialize in examining the minutiae rather than the big picture. Bottom line, the public (i.e. lay people, lawmakers, news outlets) wants to know why your research matters, and thus why it is worth their tax dollars and support. Filtering your research into this basic message can be a difficult task, especially for those who work on obscure, abstract, or basic science principles.

Get started by working on a five minute elevator speech hitting only the bare essentials of your research work to get your point across. Explaining your research to a family member can also help, as well as learning how to understand your audience. And practice, practice, practice!

For additional help and direction several organizations such as AAAS and the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science, among others, have specific communicating science toolkits and workshops that train scientists how to communicate and engage non-scientific audiences.

Major topics include:

- Communicating fundamentals https://www.aaas.org/page/communication-fundamentals-0
- Strategies for communicating online https://www.aaas.org/pes/communicating-science-online#Strategies
- Communicating to Engage https://www.aaas.org/page/communicating-engage
- Distilling Your Message Workshop http://www.centerforcommunicatingscience.org/workshops/
- AAAS Communicating Science Workshop https://www.aaas.org/pes/communicating-science-workshops

Some of the previous webinars and information from these sites are available online for free, and can serve as a jumping off point. Additionally, postdoctoral offices are offering similar courses or seminars to teach scientists communication basics. So check into your local PDO to see what they have to offer. Also, if you would like to hold a workshop at your own university follow the provided links.

Want to take action now? The non-profit organization Open Science Database (http://www.opensciencedb.com/) was created to make federally funded research more accessible and understandable to the general public. Scientists are invited to translate their published journal articles into understandable summaries for the general public to search. The database contains categories from fundamental research, federally funded research, and therapeutic discovery research. You can sign up here (http://bit.ly/2sign_up) to add your labs articles or other articles and to summarize the article.

Why should we make the effort to engage the public with our research? Engagement in public discussions on scientific research concepts, theories, and discoveries promotes an inclusive dialogue. A general understanding for what the implications of research has on society in terms of technological advances, economic growth, and daily impact can shed light on what we as scientists are trying to do and what the public perceives us as doing. Bridging this gap by increasing knowledge and diminishing presumptions will strengthen the role scientists have in the community, encourage better science policy decisions, and make science more relevant to the public.