

The Research Ambassador Program

The Research Ambassador Program enhances scientific engagement and scientific literacy in the public, particularly environmentally unaware public audiences.

ANNOUNCING: RESEARCH AMBASSADOR FELLOWSHIPS

2010-2011

What is the Research Ambassador Program?

The Research Ambassador Program (RAP) was initiated to explore ways to recruit, guide, and reward academic scientists to do outreach to non-traditional public audiences. The program received funding from the NSF Ecosystems Program in 2009. The emphasis of the RAP is to create multi-way exchanges between scientists with audiences who might not typically engage with traditional informal science education programs such as science museums and nature documentaries.

Why?

Pressing environmental issues such as global climate change, habitat degradation, and loss of biodiversity require innovative and responsive communication by scientists. These problems call for much greater engagement than currently exists between ecosystem scientists and non-scientific audiences, especially those who have little or no connection or access to science content or informal science education venues.

However, the current academic system does not reward - and sometimes penalizes - scientists who engage with the public. Even when scientists take time from their expected tasks to communicate with the public, their efforts are nearly always oriented toward scientifically aware people, rather than those who have limited access to science because of physical, cultural, or legal barriers, e.g., people in assisted living centers, urban youth, incarcerated men and women. Scientists thus miss the potential of getting fresh perspectives that underserved audiences might provide; and the environmentally unaware continue their isolation from scientists who might inform and inspire them.

One mechanism by which science administrators have expressed the need to carry out such work is through the requirement to submit "Broader Impact Statements" as Criterion 2 of all National Science Foundations grants. Proposing creative, effective, and efficient broader impacts for NSF grants is a positive value for researchers, but until now, there have been almost no guidance, tools, or models to develop such activities. The Research Ambassador Program is designed to help researchers create or replicate successful broader impact activities.

Participate

In 2010-2011, our goal is to bring more scientists and community partners into this effort. We are developing ways for scientists to become "Research Ambassadors" (RAs), tailored to meet the time and interest of participating scientists. At one end of that spectrum, scientists can simply gain access to information, literature, and descriptions of our model projects and communication training modules on our websites (www.researchambassador.com and www.sustainableprisons.com). At the middle end, our staff can provide consultation by telephone, Skype, or email to answer specific questions.

At the high end of engagement, a scientist can apply for a Research Ambassador Fellowship to receive training in non-traditional public outreach. The Program provides funds for a visit to the Research Ambassador headquarters in Olympia, Washington. During this time, staff will offer communications training, mentoring, and multiple outreach opportunities, including speaking engagements (depending on individual preferences) in state prisons, places of worship, and elderly care homes. This allows the scientist to create or fulfill Broader Impacts Requirements of NSF grants, taking advantage of our local existing networks of partners and contacts.

This 3-5 day RA Fellowship includes:

- Airfare to/from Seattle and three days of hotel accommodations in Olympia, Washington;
- Mentoring in outreach strategies with particular audiences;

- 2-4 speaking engagements at local organizations, customized for individual interests and expertise;
- Participation in a weekly staff meeting for our outreach projects, to communicate “behind the scenes” of coordinating outreach efforts;
- Feedback and evaluation, both based on our observations and surveys of audiences.

We also provide:

- Further personalized advice and mentoring for continuing outreach work after the visit;
- A letter commending your work to your department chair, professional association or funding institution;
- Acknowledgment in evaluative and scientific reports;
- Press coverage, via websites and media relations

Responsibilities of the RA include: 1) provide information to create an Outreach Profile; 2) prepare and providing draft outreach materials and ideas to the RAP to help shape the development the RA's Fellowship experience; 3) carry out outreach activities; 4) implement evaluation and provide feedback via an interview or questionnaire; and 5) attempt to recruit at least two other potential RAs.

How to Apply

We are now accepting applications for participation in this program. Submit your CV and the attached profile to Amy Stasch as soon as possible. We can accommodate your academic and research schedules and diverse interests.

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