

Scientists are often called to present their work to the public in a way that those with no science background can understand. The argument often is made that if the public could only understand what scientists do, there would be undying support for research. The Center for Nanotechnology in Society at Arizona State University challenges this unidirectional notion of influence. While the ability to explain scientific information in simple terms is an important aspect of public communication, it is not a one-way street. Science as a whole will benefit greatly if it regards its relationship with the public as a *two-way conversation*.

Some of the world's most influential scientists gained their status because they listened to and engaged with those outside of science. There are scientists in academia, industry, and government who are able to understand the questions and concerns of both the public and science. These individuals have served as important ambassadors between the two realms – scientists and non-scientists – that are increasingly codependent.

At the American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting in February, 2010, CNS-ASU hosted a panel discussion with three young scholars who had all participated in engagement projects with policy-makers and/or the general public. They explained not only why they undertook such projects and what they learned through the process, but moreover, how their experiences subsequently shaped their careers and how their scientific work changed as a result.

Lessons of Engagement: How Scientists Can Learn from Policy-Makers and the Public



Troy Benn is a PhD candidate in the School of Sustainable Engineering and the Built Environment at Arizona State University. Troy has partnered with CNS-ASU on several projects, including presenting, at the Arizona Science Center, his research on the release into wastewater of nanosilver in consumer products. The experiences have helped him contextualize, communicate, and grapple with the social and political implications of his research, as he has received much attention from policy, regulatory and industrial professionals.



Naveen Sinha, a PhD candidate in Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, participated in a program at the Museum of Science, Boston. By developing analogies and visual aids to explain his research to a general audience, he better understood what fundamental questions remain unanswered in his field. He also discovered that much science today is so interdisciplinary that he has to be able to explain his own field simply, even for other scientists in other disciplines to understand.

The final panel member was Lekelia Jenkins, a PhD and AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow working for the National Marine Fisheries Services. Lekelia has learned how to bridge the gap between academic and government scientists in order to address today's increasingly complex science and conservation management challenges.

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