**'Speed Date a Scientist'**

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600 E Washington St Phoenix, AZ 85004

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The event was held at the Arizona Science Center in downtown Phoenix as an inset of STEMfest, a networking event for a number of local teachers and members of industry interested in teaching or advocating for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Our idea was to provide a fast and fun way for the public to interface with and ask questions of scientists and engineers. The Science Museum of Minnesota ran one of these to rave reviews and we were inspired to try it here. In the end, we hosted a well-received and fun evening where the public got to know a little bit about current research, and our featured speakers were able to learn more about the questions and interests of these members of the public.

At the outset, I gave a very brief introduction to the structure of the event then invited each of our 13 featured speakers (we initially called them 'scientists' as per the 'Speed Date a Scientist' event title, but our finalized speaker list had several non-scientists that were involved in the STEM field) to come on stage and give a succinct (30 seconds only!) intro to their area of expertise. This short time allotment was stringently enforced with a stopwatch and buzzer, and set the tone for the fun and frantic pace of the event.

After their intros, the speakers were directed to one of 13 round tables with the participants already seated (incoming STEMfest participants were given a playing card as they entered to route them to a particular table). After the last intro, a 5 minute timer was started with a large digital time readout projected on the wall. With 30 seconds remaining in a session, I faded in some lively bluegrass tunes to let everyone know that time was running out. At the 5 minute mark, a loud buzzer signaled the end of the session.

The participants then had 60 seconds to hoof it to another table for the next 5 minute 'speed dating session'. We repeated this a total of 5 times. Our featured speakers had wide-ranging expertise, and the participants were able to chat about a huge number of topics: astrobiology, human disease and health policy, environmental chemistry and pollutants, science policy, neuroprosthetics, research ethics, new developments in IT, and so many more.

We primed our speakers prior to the event, with conversation-prodding questions. While we hoped that the participants would be bursting with questions to ask them, in the event that they were a bit sluggish in joining the frenetic spirit of the event, we suggested that they ask their tables any of the following: 1) What are your concerns about (this particular field of research)? 2) How do you think the media portrays advances in this field? 3) What sort of social impacts do you see (or forsee) as a result of applying this research or these advances?

To our delight, none of the speakers reported having to nudge the conversation along, and instead noted that they were on their toes to keep up with the questions and the rapid communication at the tables. In addition, both speakers and participants alike bemoaned the short time for each session, and so continued their discussions at the mixer afterward. We couldn't ask for a better outcome!

We were most pleased that the spirit of the event seemed to hold. While it's always a great idea to put the public in touch with experts in a field so they can ask questions, we really wanted to see more of an engagement, a back-and-forth between all of the parties involved. When I talked to participants and speakers afterward, I heard time and again that this was the case. For our first try at an event of this kind, we were very pleased with the results.

With a few logistical tweaks, we would like to run another event in a similar vein. The Arizona Science Center leadership enjoyed the event as well and has expressed interest in working together again.