Break-out Session: Training: Moderator: Peter Genzer

Four areas of discussion:

1. What is not working at present?
2. What are obstacles have you faced/are you facing in trying to do more of this?
3. What can DOE or other federal agencies do to help?
4. Whom do we want to receive training?

What is working and not working at present? To help labs conduct communications training for scientists, federal agencies could have the Director of the Office of Science Chris Fall tell directors to do it, DOE tell labs to do a broader training program, and/or include additional funds to do this training. Currently, upper level management has not been trained in communications and does not see the worth it has or the obstacles to it. If DOE values training, it needs to show support.

The group suggested running training programs for retired staff, researchers quoted in press releases and designated to handle follow-up press inquiries, post-docs, and graduate students. As part of that training, trainers and communications staff need to show the PIs and graduate students how communications training will help their careers. Other ideas included creating a roadmap of training opportunities, turning training into a certification program, creating a list of trained staff and areas of expertise, and developing a manual of standards for science communication (as simple as "What to wear for a television interview").

The group also recommended doing regular public events and outreach as practice for researchers who have gone through training. Family Days and Open Houses are popular. Other ideas were Professors at the Pub, Lab Talks (patterned after TED Talks), Reddit Ask Me Anything sessions (with a communications person sitting with the researcher), and multi-lab AMAs. Communications staff members could even help PIs create Facebook posts for their family and friends.

Obstacles

The biggest obstacle is that communications training is not designated a priority; funding and time are not sourced. Presently, a scientist must be willing to donate their time to do communications. A mandate from the top should enforce that each project would have a dedicated percentage of time and funding to do communications. Also, one-and-done training is not effective. Training needs to be on-going.

What can DOE or other federal agencies do to help?

Presently, DOE's approval process is unclear. If the press release has been cleared, why does the succeeding interview need approval? Can we get PA's approval on a specific group of trained scientists? Alternatively, DOE should trust our scientists and reinforce the 'backing off.' Although DOE's scientists are able to speak openly, the mechanism behind the scene – such as looping in Public Affairs – brings a 'No' or a delay until the interview is dead.

Who do we want to receive communications training?

Chris Fall and/or Paul Dabbar (DOE's undersecretary for science) must tell senior leadership to take and value communications training. Graduate students will help with STEM efforts. (Do graduate students generally communicate the need for long-term funding?) We need to train scientists who have bought into the strategy and purpose of communications training.