Future funding, not to be taken for granted

Researchers are often so dedicated to their particular area of research that they devote long hours to their endeavors. We all benefit from the advances made possible by researchers who are completely invested in their work. What happens, however, when scientists need to translate the goals, results, and potential benefits of their research to individuals such as policymakers, patients, and the general public? Scientists and engineers are quite good at communicating with fellow experts in their fields, but communication to other audiences can often be overlooked. Researchers would usually prefer to focus on the research itself; most are not trained to communicate to nontechnical audiences, and the incentives for broader public communication are often lacking.

Explaining the process, potential, and results of research is a challenging but nevertheless essential undertaking. The value of the country’s investments in science is occasionally questioned by politicians as they seek to restrain and cut federal spending. When this happens, the scientific community scrambles to defend basic research. Here’s one example, from LiveScience, which puts the crux of the communication problem in context: “Scientists Cry Foul Over Report Criticizing National Science Foundation.” In April, Physics Today drew attention to one recent example in a Science and the Media commentary by Steve Corneliussen, Federally Funded Study of Ducks’ Reproductive Evolution Ignites a Media Controversy. The fact that these criticisms play out in the media underlines the root of the problem—that it’s really one of communication (or the lack thereof). The science community stands to gain by getting out in front of such criticism with better, more formalized communication.

Scientific societies like AIP and many of its Member Societies invest in professional science writers to scan the scientific literature, including that which comes from their own conferences and publications, to identify important studies and communicate them to the public. AIP’s Media Team feeds traditional and web-based media with write-ups of breaking scientific developments. These studies often include frontier research, new discoveries, or near-term applications to our economy, health, or security. The research may advance our fundamental understanding of nature; it may not have a practical application in the foreseeable future but adds immeasurably to the foundation of science.

We are fortunate to have organizations like the Association of American Universities and the American Association for the Advancement of Science that promote the value of important scientific studies that can be easily misinterpreted by the public or policymakers. The annual Golden Goose Awards, co-
sponsored by several organizations, draw attention to federally funded and seemingly obscure studies that have led to major breakthroughs with significant societal impact. Some organizations also support media-training programs for their researchers to help them communicate when given the opportunity to describe their work to reporters or other sectors of the public.

However, these efforts are not enough. The volume of research has exploded in the last 40 years even as the number of reporters who cover science has dwindled. Communication has not kept pace with translation, and as a result, so much in science is simply absent from public discussion.

What is the solution? A collaborative model coupling researchers and professional communicators could be used to communicate information about federally funded research grants, explaining esoteric, irrelevant-sounding, and easily misinterpreted work to legislators and the public. Funding agencies, publishers, scientific organizations, scientists, and professional communicators could all play a role in this important effort. Yet, in order to be fully realized, this function should be embraced as an essential part of the pursuit of science. It should be encouraged, funded, and rewarded by research institutions and funding sources.

In times of budget austerity, it is difficult to imagine finding the resources to dedicate to formal communication about research grants. However, not communicating the purpose and outcome of both grants and research results jeopardizes the future of research. The scientific community is feeling the impacts of poorly communicated scientific research in the news, in public support, and in the halls of Congress. Success has everything to do with broadening the base of understanding of the value of research and its relevance to society.

From AIP Publishing

AIP Publishing exhibits at SLA 2013

Over 100 librarians visited the AIP Publishing booth at the Special Libraries Association Conference in San Diego (June 9-11, 2013).

Librarians spoke to AIP Publishing sales representatives about their current collection, and found out what is new. Booth visitors received an AIP Publishing atom glow-in-the-dark t-shirt.

AIP continued its tradition of sponsoring the PAM Open House held this year on June 10th at the San Diego Marriot Marquis and Marina. Close to 100 librarians attended.

Physics Resources Matters

ISTV expands reach, at home and abroad
Inside Science TV (ISTV), produced in the AIP News and Media Services Division, added its newest local television station, WDIV, the NBC affiliate in Detroit, is ranked the 11th largest television market in the US and represents the biggest market for ISTV to date. Nielsen Media Research divides the US television viewing audience into 210 markets, with #1 (New York) being the largest viewing audience and #210 (Glendive, MO) the smallest. This addition brings the total number of US local television stations that receive the twice-weekly ISTV to 38. WDIV station meteorologist Paul Gross plans to start airing the segments this summer on the station, which regularly tops the local ratings in evening newscasts.

ISTV has also completed its first international licensing deals with two large networks: Da Vinci, a Europe-based educational cable company, and Al-Jazeera, the Middle-East-based international news network. Da Vinci is licensing 104 segments, with plans to broadcast them in various markets in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Both networks approached TVS, our syndicator, with a high level of interest in broadcasting our program to their audiences. Al-Jazeera is licensing 48 segments for broadcast in their markets in the Middle East. Inside Science team members continue to market the program to more international and national television networks.

Member Society Spotlight

New discoveries in the science of sound reverberate at international acoustics meeting

Bio-inspired microphones, sound-enhanced biofuel production, and the science behind the cicada's buzz were just some of the latest inventions and discoveries featured at the 21st International Congress on Acoustics (ICA 2013), held June 2-7 in Montreal, Canada. The meeting was jointly hosted by the Acoustical Society of America and the Canadian Acoustical Association. AIP’s Media Team helped publicize the meeting by selecting newsworthy presentations, writing and editing press releases, coordinating the submission and posting of lay-language papers to ASA's World Wide Press Room, and organizing and conducting a webcast press briefing. The efforts resulted in widespread media coverage of science from the meeting, including stories in Science News, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, and many other national and international news outlets.

Coming Up
June 21-23

- AIP Executive Committee Retreat (Irvington, VA)

Thursday, June 27

- AIP Publishing Staff Picnic and “Murder Mystery” (Melville)

July 4-5

- AIP and AIP Publishing closed in honor of the 4th of July holiday (College Park and Melville)