

Working Group Report for LTER ASM 2012

**“Communicating LTER Science” Working Group Parts I and II**

Working Group Session 1: Monday September 10, 2012 1:30p to 3:30p Ruesch Auditorium Sweet

Working Group Session 5: Wednesday September 12, 2012 10:00a to 12:00p Ruesch Auditorium Sweet

Lead Organizer: Susan Dailey, FCE

Co-Organizers: Chris Neill, PIE; Marcia Nation, CAP

Note taker for both sessions: Chris Sanchez, FCE and CAP

For the abstract and agenda of the “Communicating LTER Science” working group please visit:

<http://asm2012.lternet.edu/working-groups/communicating-lter-science-part-i-and-ii>

We circulated an invitation, the abstract for the working group sessions, and the agenda for each day of these targeted working group sessions in the week prior to the ASM to all lead PIs, all named site communicators, and LTER site representatives in an effort to increase participation from all LTER sites. The sessions were well attended with a total of 43 attendees who signed in the first day and 26 attendees who signed in the second day. In total 19 LTER sites were represented as well as LNO, NSF and at least one school district. In our pre meeting correspondences we also asked attendees to bring along a research story idea to obtain professional advisement from our invited communicators.

**Communicating LTER Science Working Group Part I**

***Best Practices for Communicating LTER Science:***

For the first two hour session of the working group we focused on information sharing for communicating LTER Science in three main areas: Communicating Science to NSF; Communicating Science to the public; and Communicating Science to policy makers. We had invited three professional communicators, each with a strength that matched one of our focal areas for communication needs. We asked each communicator to present best practices and what key elements are required for each of area of communication. We structured the working group so that each professional communicator presented first a five-minute presentation of their best practices then a five-minute presentation of the elements that were required for each field of communication. Each of these sections of presentations was followed by an interactive discussion with the panel of professional communicators who answered questions from the attendees.

Our first presenter, Cheryl Dybas, from the Office of Legislative and Public Affairs Media at NSF, delivered a package of tools to the attendees to keep in mind when presenting LTER research to both the public and to NSF. Cheryl explained the need to condense the research story to five minutes or less to hold the attention of the audience and that this has become popular across many major scientific societies including ESA. She also related that the secret to effective scientific writing is less scientific jargon and more “public filter-feeding” and that for a story to be successful the writer must have a passion for the subject, have an exciting and concise presentation, and awareness of the target audience. She concluded her best practice presentation with the distinction that in scientific journal articles we are used to putting the conclusions at the end but that in communicating to popular media conclusions and “what matters” needs to be put up front.

Our second presenter, Kathy Fallon Lambert, Science and Policy Integration Project Director at Harvard Forest, presented a package of information for communicating with policy makers. Among Kathy’s message were that we need to bring more people into the communication process and make interactions interactive. She highlighted the need to take time to craft a synopsis and create a press release about what has been learned over a period of time at our LTER sites and to think about the target audience and whose decisions you are trying to influence. Kathy also explained that we should think “campaign” to really influence decision makers and to create a long-term strategy. To that end she recommended that we queue up multiple research strategies, maximize steady and sustained exposure and that we should “prepare for the long haul” and rehash the message multiple times.

Our third presenter, Susan Moran, freelance science journalist and radio show host for Boulder CO, KNGU’s “How on Earth” presented a package of information best practices for communicating science to popular media. Susan explained that we should tell a research “story” and wrap the facts of the research in stories about the people and places that produced the facts. She iterated that we do need to show our passion in these stories and show our personality. Another message was that we should “show- don’t tell” and to give concrete examples and physicality and we should put numbers in context.

Following the best practices we had a rousing discussion where working group participants posed questions to the panel of presenters. One highlight question that audience asked was; “Where do you start with the stories?” and the panel answered that we need to look at the research with the right eyes but that anything can make a good story if you can capture your research in a way that includes strong narrative, interesting character, and relevant broader impact.

### ***Elements of Effective communication for NSF press releases, science to policy makers and to popular media***

The second set of presentations from our invited communicators involved activities where the working group attendees interacted with the presenters to develop their communication skills and help identify what each communication form requires. Cheryl Dybas lead a “Pitch-Slam” activity where attendees pitched a

story idea and Cheryl helped the story proposer identify the critical message. Kathy Fallon Lambert presented a role-playing policy proposal and emphasized the need for a very clear beginning, middle and end for the proposal. She led the participants of the working group in identifying components for effective communication with policy makers. These components included; the need to use local people and stories for relevance and connection and to speak directly to the target audience; that we should make the story positive and use simple data and graphs; the presentation should be actionable and solution oriented and to do all of this with a specific plan with a specific time line. Susan Moran presented that we need to add flair, drama and mystery to the story and make it counterintuitive and provocative. Susan also conveyed the need to have the components of both conflict and resolution in our research stories for popular media and provided several examples.

We then broke into four smaller working groups and the professional science communicators circulated between the groups to provide advice of developing the individual stories that some of the attendees had prepared in advance of the working group.

### **Communicating LTER Science Part II:**

For the second day/session of the communication working group we adapted our agenda to include the new faces that were not present in the first half of the working group. Two of our professional science communicators, Kathy Fallon Lambert and Susan Moran, recapped their information and presentations from Part I for communicating research with policy makers and the popular media.

In this adapted second information sharing session Susan Moran also presented two radio clips of interviews she had done with research scientists. She had us listen to the clips and then identify the strengths and weaknesses in the communication of research. She recommended that when communicating via radio interview we sometimes need to skirt our comfort zone and speak more broadly, even if it is out of our area of expertise but concurrently stressed the need to use relevant numbers to report our findings. Ms. Moran also recommended “don’t be such a scientist” and that we work on speaking more as a person and not a professional.

Participants then divided into two breakout groups, each working with either Susan Moran or Kathy Fallon Lambert to develop research story ideas with professional advisement. With the three main items in mind: what is your central question/issue/problem?; why should readers care?; and potential benefits or solutions the story addresses; each individual attending the working group received assistance from either Kathy or Susan in proceeding with their research story development.

### **Product and Recommendations from the Communicating LTER Science working groups:**

Participants from the working group continue to develop their research stories and submit these research communications to a variety of venues. Susan Moran (susankmoran@gmail.com) has been in contact with several of the working group participants and will continue to work with individuals interested in working with her to develop media releases. Cheryl Dybas (cdybas@nsf.gov) recommended that we contact her if we identify relevant NSF press releases for our LTER research.

Recommendations from the participants of the working group included the following:

1. A strong voicing that we have this Communicating LTER Science working group at the next ASM in 2015
2. A need for further training for developing LTER Communications was expressed.
3. A need for tracking LTER communications via Google alerts or other forms of tracking media