

## Public Interfaces of the Life Sciences

# Sustainable Infrastructures for Life Science Communication

Workshop and Discussion

January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014

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# #NASInterface

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# Sustainable Infrastructures for Life Science Communication

What did we learn on Day 1?

# Key questions we asked

- What do we mean by “sustainable infrastructures”?
- Why are they important?
- What do they produce?
- What do they look like?
- What does research tell us about them?
- *For all these questions: What do we know? What do we not know?*

# In practice...

**Many passionate individual life scientists engage in communication their research.**

- Mostly without overt institutional support
- Usually with institutional benign neglect, seldom active hostility
- General lack of success scaling up one-off models of communication
- *“Altruism is not a sustainable model”*

# Research told us...

- Extrinsic rewards do not seem to contribute to a scientist's likelihood of engaging in PCST
- Scientists are conservative in beliefs about publication, scientific process, institutional forces
- Though many individuals trying new media

# And research told us...

- Scientists hold to “provide information” model, but social science shows that as important are:
  - Audience [segmentation]
  - Frames
  - Trust
  - Emotions
- *But not:* How to change scientists’ models

# In practice...

## Many organizations have robust approaches to life sciences communication

- May conflate marketing with communicating
- Often geared *institutionally* toward legacy media rather than new media
- *Organizations with clearly defined goals tend to have better defined communication protocols*



# In practice...

## **Policies may (knowingly or unknowingly) hamper communication**

- “Gag orders” in guise of coordinating communication create mistrust and missed opportunities
- “Handling” communicators may be well intended but poorly received
- *Institutional policies should not create “better safe than sorry” attitude toward communications*

# Research told us...

- Maybe new media are creating changes in institutional incentives
- New initiatives in training scientists for communication widespread
- Training efforts should be focused on core communication competencies
- *But not:* What actions can sustainably change institutional infrastructures?

# In practice...

## **No community of practice exists in life sciences communication**

- Lacks clear vision of the communication value proposition
- Continues to focus on traditional academic communication as the gold standard
- Unconnected to communications research literature
- *Cultural transformation is difficult*

# In practice...

## **Few examples of communication impact or metrics of success were shared**

- Metrics tended toward process rather than impact of exposure
- Partly this is because the community has not articulated what success would look like
- Metrics not widely shared in a community of practice
- *Evaluation is critical to sustainability*

## Remaining questions (what we don't know):

- How do we get scientists to understand media/publics?
- How do these ideas get implemented in academe, industry, NGOs, government?
- Ultimately: What's the "value proposition" for individuals and institutions?