

Training scientists to communicate with the public in science centres and museums



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The European network of science
centres and museums

Why should Ecsite organise communication training for scientists?

- to help meet the public demand for the 'live science' experience
- provide a pool of scientists willing and able to communicate directly with the public
- Facilitate interaction between science centres/museums and researchers
- Enhance researchers' skills in communication
- enhance Ecsite's partnership with local science centres and museums, and use of mutual expertise

How can Ecsite support scientists in communicating with the public



- providing them with high-quality workshops led by experienced trainers
- encouraging reflection on the value and the motives of communication
- putting scientists in contact with science centres and museums where they can find a public and professional support

Training set-up

- partnership with research organisation
- Dialogue about real needs
- Ask the participants about their expectations



- Make the most of the network
- give confidence
- train for dialogue and controversy

Establish Partnerships



- Network of Excellence on biodiversity, structure, functions and dynamics of ecosystems

- European Cooperation in Science and Technology – intergovernmental instrument supporting cooperation among scientists and researchers across Europe



Ingredients of training

- Warm open atmosphere
- Practice and feedback
- Evidence
- Reflection
- Examples
- Contacts



Needs expressed by the research partner

- Specific to the topic: Alter-Net scientists work on biodiversity, highly controversial
- Tailor message and tools to the audience: Cost aims the training to senior scientists

Tailoring the experience to specific needs



■ Museon

Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh



Location added value in science centres and museums

Professional exchange

- explainers have experience with public communication



Learning environment

- on natural sciences and biodiversity



Needs expressed by the researchers

- Results from a survey run through alter-Net researchers in 2008 prior to the training course organisation
- Mostly junior researchers such as PhD students answered

It's (almost) all about confidence

- to which extent can a “shy, crazy scientist” be converted into someone who can communicate to the audience?
- Skills that should be taught:
 - techniques to speak in public
 - tricks to view the audience, target the message
 - Tools including visual aids, metaphors, tangible things
 - different kinds of presentation/interaction situations, modern media and also interactive exhibits
 - techniques to engage the audience
 - how to pitch the information – not too complex but not too insulting.
 - some tricks to handle a difficult audience, for example one that is not interested

How scientists see communication

- Characteristics of a good communicator:
- enthusiastic about the subject at hand
- able to identify with lay people
- open-minded
- kind, friendly and approachable
- communicative, confident
- autonomous and impartial in controversies

- Skills required in communicating effectively about science:
- deep knowledge of the scientific matter
- knowledge of the methods employed in the interaction with laypeople
- ability to present science without using specialized language
- ability to identify the main issues and story line
- ability to facilitate a dialogue between science and society
- ability to speak clearly

What scientists think a good communicator should do

- identify the important issues for that public
- identify the benefits of the results to the public
- gauge the level of knowledge of the audience
- take the public's expectations into account
- transmit scientific information in a simplified, yet still factually correct form
- respect territorial, cultural and mental differences of all audiences
- present uncertainties involved in scientific topics
- involve all senses (looking, listening, touching etc.)
- transmit enthusiasm and make the topic interesting
- challenge the public
- help the audience overcome its preconceptions
- avoid using technical language

Thank you for your attention!

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