OUTREACH – EDUCATION – DISSEMINATION

Most granting agencies and foundations receive funds from the public sector. They are under increasing scrutiny to show that their awards produce useful and applied outcomes. Consequently, these applications frequently require dissemination plans. Outreach and education activities are a form of dissemination often required. It is through these activities that researchers can play an important role in enhancing the public sector’s understanding and interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), and broaden teacher and students’ experiences in STEM fields.

Education and outreach methods are best developed by starting early in the proposal process and consulting with an expert. Penn State has a wealth of ongoing outreach activities with specialized personnel who can provide excellent advice and partnership possibilities. Before contacting one of these individuals, principal investigators should consider the following questions that are likely to be asked:

1. Which audiences are you interested in reaching, and why (e.g., K-12 students, K-12 teachers, community and workforce development, higher education)?
2. What education disciplines would best align with the topic of the research?
3. What outcomes or goals do you want the broader impacts program to have?
4. Are there existing PSU outreach activities you would like to collaborate with, use as a model, or include in your project?
5. What level of impact would you consider for your program (e.g., local, state, national)?
6. What is the timeline available for developing the outreach plan?
7. What is the timeline available for implementation of activities if the proposal is funded?
8. What funds can be budgeted to support these activities?
9. Who from among the research team is interested and willing to be involved in the outreach activities?
10. What kind of time commitment is available for researchers to participate in development and implementation of activities if the proposal is funded, and who are these individuals?

In order to help you identify what type of outreach project you might be interested in developing, and possible existing programs you might want to leverage in that design, we have prepared a table summarizing ongoing outreach opportunities at Penn State. This table (provided by the Center for Science and the Schools, CSATS*) is organized by subject area (i.e. outreach group) and target audience, meant to offer a sampling of the existing programs, not an exhaustive list, to get you started. It also includes hot links to each of the outreach groups and projects listed in the table, enabling you to find more information about those you may be interested in, as well as contact information. Investigators are encouraged to contact one or more organization representative for specific ideas on the best dissemination method to reach potentially interested audiences. For more information about the outreach table and guidance on developing projects that leverage one or more of these ongoing projects, contact Kevin

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*If you wish to be added to the table, please contact Annmarie Ward, Director, Center for Science and the Schools (aw192@psu.edu).
Dressler (kxd13@psu.edu) or Lorraine Mulfinger (lxm14@psu.edu) at the Strategic Interdisciplinary research office (SIRO). SIRO and CSATS will update the table and this document on a bi-annual basis or as major projects with imminent impact are introduced.

Convincing plans need to be specific and include letters of support from cooperating individuals and organizations. Starting this section of the proposal early in the process is important for a complete and potentially well-reviewed plan, salient connections with Penn State education and outreach experts and higher success rates when funded.