

# Public Engagement with Science Policy: New Roles for Science Museums?

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# Public Engagement with Science

- In science museums, public engagement means just about everything we do programmatically
- In public policy, public engagement with science refers to seeking public input into policy decisions about the application of science and technology in society.



# A Call for Public Engagement

From Deficit to Dialogue - ASTC 2003

We need to engage the public in a more open and honest bidirectional dialogue about science and technology and their products, including not only their benefits but also their limits, perils, and pitfalls. We need to respect the public's perspective and concerns even when we do not fully share them, and we need to develop a partnership that can respond to them.

- Alan I. Leshner, CEO AAAS, Science 14 February 2003

# Two paradigms for building public support for science

- Public Understanding of Science
- Public Engagement with Science

# Key Differences in Focus

## Understanding

- Characterized by one-way transmission of scientific knowledge and process
- Focuses on understanding the natural and human-made world
- Based on the belief that as people become more scientifically literate, they will accept, support, and use science

## Engagement

- Characterized by mutual learning or informing among people of varied backgrounds
- Focuses on current and/or controversial science-related issues
- Based on the belief that both scientists and non-scientists can bring valuable perspectives to help guide the application of science in society

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# With respect to this Public Engagement Paradigm:

- What are the opportunities for science centers?
- Do science centers have a responsibility to engage the public in this way?
- What are the pitfalls of public engagement?
- What would it take to do it?



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Science Museum of Minnesota

Science museums should build more social science perspectives, societal implications, ethics, and public policy issues into their exhibits and programs. We should work to increase public knowledge about societal implications of new and current technologies.



NISE Net Forum, Museum of Science

Science museums should conduct debates, science cafes, forums, dialogue, and deliberation into their programming. In addition to increasing knowledge, this gives the public practical experience with collective deliberation and decision-making about issues of societal importance.



Science museums should collect public views and ideas expressed in forum programs and communicate those views and ideas to appropriate decision-making and oversight bodies, such as scientific and governmental entities. This would be aimed at developing the capacity of science museums to provide a mechanism for public engagement/consultation in sci-tech policy at a variety of levels.

# With respect to each of these options:

- What are the opportunities for science centers?
- Do science centers have a responsibility to engage the public in this way?
- What are the pitfalls of this kind of public engagement?
- What would it take to do it?