

ARVO Outreach Tools

How to prepare an event for scientists about science policy issues



The Association for Research
in Vision and Ophthalmology

1801 Rockville Pike, Suite 400
Rockville, MD 20852
+1.240.221.2900 | arvo.org
Questions? outreach@arvo.org

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Introduction

This guide aims to provide a basic schedule of tasks for creating a stand-alone event that raises awareness of science policy issues. It is not meant to be comprehensive, but offers an overview of the planning timeline and example event formats and topics that will help get you started in planning an event. More broadly, this guide can be used for planning any type of event that brings guest speakers to a group of interested individuals in an academic setting.

Prerequisites

To hold an event focused around science policy, organizers will need:

1. An estimation of the **amount of money** you have available for the event.
 - a. With very little or no money, you can invite local speakers to talk to a group out of the kindness of their hearts. A room at your institution can usually be reserved without cost, and often local community businesses/organizations have meeting rooms that can be reserved for little to no money.
 - b. With a few hundred dollars, you will be able to fund a speaker traveling to your institution. This money can go toward their travel and hotel (if necessary), and for their meals. Instead of or in addition to paying for an outside speaker, you may provide food/beverages at your event.
 - c. With closer to a thousand dollars, you can bring in a big name speaker and pay their travel/hotel/food costs as well as speaker fees.
2. An idea of the **type of event** you'd like to hold. Consider past events your colleagues enjoyed. Do they prefer lectures, discussions, or happy hours? See pros and cons of these and other event formats in Appendix 1.
3. Ideas of **speakers to invite**. Consider local faculty members/students doing research at the intersection of science and policy, political figures with an interest in science, colleagues with an interest in researching and presenting a particular topic, leaders of organizations doing policy work, etc. See event topic ideas in Appendix 2.

1. Three+ months before the event

1.1 Create budget

Determine if you have funding through your department, your own grants (if there is money set aside for outreach), or external sources. This money can be used to pay for travel/hotel/meal expenses for guest speakers and/or to provide food and beverages at your event.

1.2 Create basic plan for the event

First, choose an event format that will cater to your audience and goals (see Appendix 1 for event type ideas, along with their pros and cons). Second, choose a topic (see Appendix 2 for examples). Be sure to consider the interests of your audience and the expertise of local colleagues, community members and political officials who may be willing to act as speakers. You may consider doing an informal poll of potential attendees to guide you in selecting an event type and topic.

1.3 Select time

Select a time to hold your event based on your department's culture and your audience's general availability. Lunchtime lectures are quite common in many departments and are likely to be well attended, especially if you provide food. Late afternoon events during the workday can be tricky for some people to attend due to class or work schedules. Early evening events after 5pm work well for many people whose workdays follow traditional hours, but those who have regular after-work commitments such as caring for children may have a difficult time attending.

1.4 Invite speaker(s)

Get in touch with your potential speaker(s) and offer a description of the event you want to host and the topic you would like them to cover. Work with them to identify a date that works, collaborate on a title and description of the event for publicity purposes, and find out what resources they'll need (eg, projector, laptop, handouts). If the speaker is traveling to your event, book their flight and hotel accommodations.

1.5 Secure venue

Reserve a space large enough to accommodate your ideal audience. If you are planning a group discussion, reserve a room where chairs can be moved and people can turn toward each other. If you are planning a lecture, a more traditional lecture room with a screen will suffice. If you are planning a happy hour, find a room where beverages can be brought in, or reserve space for your party at a local establishment that is easily accessible by foot or public transportation.

2. One month before the event

2.1 Order food and beverages (if necessary)

If you have the budget, estimate your attendance and order the appropriate number of lunches, amount of coffee, cookies, etc.

2.2 Identify event host

This person should introduce the guest speaker and/or facilitate the event. This person may be you!

2.3 Publicize the event

With input from the speaker, write up a short but interesting description of the event. If possible, include a link to an article or paper related to the event topic. Be sure to mention if food/refreshments will be provided. Then, spread the word! Email your colleagues, share on social media, have the event listed on your department/institution's calendar/newsletters, and hang flyers in appropriate areas. If you want interdisciplinary participation, send your event to the managers of other departments for distribution. If you are planning an event where space is limited, you may want to have people sign-up in advance. Consider using a free service such as SurveyMonkey to collect RSVPs.

3. One week before the event

3.1 Send out a reminder announcement to interested parties

Remind people of the event via email, social media, and in person. Be sure you contact anyone who has explicitly expressed interest in attending.

3.2 Check in with guest speaker(s)

Ensure that the speaker(s) have all the information they need. You may consider meeting with the speaker to make sure they understand the event format and time constraints and that they are prepared to cover the topics you requested.

3.3 Arrange extra activities

If your speaker is not local, you may consider arranging activities/meetings/meals for them with interested colleagues. For instance, you may organize for a group of students take the speaker out to dinner.

4. Day of the event

4.1 Setup food and drink station (if necessary)

Try to position the station where there is plenty of room for people to mill around. Be sure to have enough napkins, plates, utensils, etc.

4.2 Have people sign-in

Provide a sign-in sheet (see Appendix 3) to the attendees to retain contact information for future events.

4.3 Hosting duties

The host should be prepared to ask attendees to introduce themselves (if small group), introduce the speaker(s), and guide and encourage discussion and/or questions from the audience when appropriate.

5. After the event

5.1 Thank speaker(s)

Get in touch with your speaker(s) and thank them for their time. They may become a valuable connection in your network in the future.

5.2 Ask for feedback

Contact the attendees, thank them for attending, and invite them to give feedback on the event (Appendix 4). Incorporate their feedback into future events.

Appendix 1: Event Formats

1. Lecture
 - a. Attendees will have little required of them except to pay attention. This is a format that many scientists are accustomed to, making them more likely to attend.
 - b. The guest speaker should prepare a talk with time for questions and discussion.
 - c. Organization difficulty: easy
 - d. Typically 1 hour long
2. Happy hour
 - a. Encourages social time among people with similar interests
 - b. May be organized around a single topic of discussion to give people a conversational starting point
 - c. Try to provide an open space with few chairs for ease of mingling
 - d. Organization difficulty: easy
 - e. Typically 1-2 hours long
3. Small-group discussion
 - a. Attendees will be asked to participate, so this option may be difficult to execute with shy groups
 - b. If your colleagues are not accustomed to group discussions, they may not feel comfortable attending or participating
 - c. A guest speaker may not be necessary, but someone must facilitate and guide the discussion
 - d. Organization difficulty: medium
 - e. Typically 1-1.5 hours long
4. Book club
 - a. Select a book on a science/cultural/advocacy/policy topic of mutual interest and hold a happy hour event or small-group discussion to talk about it
 - b. If you can, bring the author to your discussion to talk about the book
 - c. Announce the book club far enough in advance that people have time to read the book
 - d. May attract a different segment of your typical audience
 - e. Organization difficulty: medium
5. Workshop
 - a. Educates attendees on a single topic or task
 - b. Multiple experts on a single related topic may be invited to talk on a panel, or work with attendees in small groups
 - c. Organization difficulty: hard
 - d. Can be a half-day or full-day event

Appendix 2: Suggested Event Topics

What is science policy and why should we care?

Communication of science to the public and lawmakers

Basic versus translational research

Women in science

Policy implications of DIY bioscience

Policy and pints: a discussion about science education

Scientific misconduct

Do drug discovery efforts focus only on profitable drugs?

Ethics and policies of animal research

How should new findings about placebos affect the policy governing their use?

How research funding relate to ethics: A conversation about the structure of science and technology policy in the U.S.

Rewriting the National Science Education Standards

Framing Issues in Science Policy: What role should scientists play?

Book club: Free Radicals: The Secret Anarchy of Science by Michael Brooks

Science according to the presidential candidates

Policy issues surrounding genetically modified organisms

How much money is a human life worth?

Lessons from an AAAS fellow

The state of science in Spain and Europe

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V

How scientists can get involved in policy

Law and neuroscience

Scholarly publishing: can scholars fix what's broken?

Building Environmentally Healthy, Climate Resilient Cities

Appendix 3: Sign-in Sheet

Name	Email (if you'd like to be on the email list)	Department	Title/position	How did you hear about this event?	Are you interested in helping to plan future events?

Appendix 4: Feedback Form

Feedback Form

Name (optional) _____

1. What topics within the scope of science, policy, and society are you interested in hearing about and discussing?

2. Do you plan to attend future sessions? Yes No Maybe

3. What did you like about today's session? _____

4. What could have been better about today's session? _____

5. Additional comments: _____
