

Mission

Portal to the Public develops a proven, scalable program model for Informal Science Educators to engage scientists and public audiences in face-to-face interactions that promote appreciation and understanding of current scientific research.

Project Team

Portal to the Public is a collaborative project, engaging the following institutions:

- Pacific Science Center Seattle, WA
Dennis Schatz, PI
- Explora Albuquerque, NM
Kristin Leigh, Co-PI
- North Museum of Natural History and Science Lancaster, PA
Margie Marino, Co-PI
- Institute for Learning Innovation Edgewater, MD
Martin Storksdeick Co-PI
- Tisdal Consulting, St. Louis, MO
Carey Tisdal, Evaluator



Community Partnerships

Each museum collaborator has developed partnerships with diverse local research organizations including universities, government agencies and the private sector.



PORTAL to the Public

Public Programs

Portal to the Public develops, evaluates and disseminates various cost-effective delivery mechanisms to promote public audiences' appreciation and understanding of current work being done in science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

Portal to the Public programs:

- Provide opportunities for face-to-face interactions between scientists/researchers and public audiences
- Are facilitated by scientists/researchers who have participated in professional development regarding effective presentation skills with ISE staff support.
- Occur in an informal learning environment.



Example program formats include: Hands-on activity centers, science fair and science festival type events forums for in-depth discussion with experts, opportunities to participate in real research, lectures

Professional Development

Portal to the Public develops, evaluates and disseminates modular professional development elements that ISE staff can facilitate to prepare scientist volunteers to work with public audiences. Elements include workshop activities, one-on-one support resources and written documents. A professional development program can be designed from these elements to match the specific needs of scientist volunteers and the particular public program.



Professional Development content objectives are:

- Scientists develop communication strategies that support inquiry.
- Scientists and ISE staff work together to design and facilitate materials-rich learning experiences that actively involve and affect all parties.
- Scientists understand the importance to learning of developing personal connections with audiences based on shared experiences.
- Scientists develop a broader understanding of how people learn and the nature of informal learning environments.
- Scientists and ISE staff develop an understanding of the organizational culture of each other's institutions.

Research

Portal to the Public researches the implementation and outcome of the professional development and public programs across all three museum sites. The research project will ensure that the Portal to the Public project results are generalizable (have model character) and useful to the science center and museum field. Using a mixed method approach, blending ethnographic research, surveys, and assessments, three major groups will be sampled: informal science educators at the three museums, participating research scientists, and audiences at the three museums who take part in programming developed and delivered through this project. The overarching question guiding the research is "Can ISE institutions successfully convey current science by featuring research scientists in special programming and to what fraction of their audience?" The research results will ultimately be used by the project team to develop the model(s) of cooperation between scientists and ISEs that will be disseminated to the field.

Supporting a Professional Learning Community

Portal to the Public endeavors to support a professional learning community of institutions and individuals committed to improving the public understanding and appreciation of current science research.

Specific activities include:

- Bookend meetings at the front and back end of the grant period. The first bookend meeting, titled the "Synthesis Meeting" was held in January 2008 at the Pacific Science Center in Seattle, WA. Around fifty experts and leaders in the field were invited to attend. These bookend meetings will identify current initiatives and best practices related to involving scientists and researchers in ISE activities, and gauged future directions regarding activities in the field that:
 - a. Support partnership and collaboration between research organizations and informal science education institutions,
 - b. Involve face-to-face interactions between scientists and public audiences, and
 - c. Involve professional development that prepares scientists to work effectively face-to-face with public audiences.
- Mid-Course Dissemination effort midway through the grant period to train and support five museums in adopting pieces of Portal to the Public program models.
- Wide dissemination of Portal to the Public research, public program models and professional development elements.



Portal to the Public is made possible with funding from the National Science Foundation under Grant No. DRL-0639021

