

## ASA Early Career Researcher Mentoring Workshop – Session summary

Session Topic: Government, Outreach, and Social Media

Discussion Leader: P. Quinn, B. Schmidt

If you only remember three things from this talk, remember these...

1. Danaerys Targaryen doesn't care about goats, and politicians (generally) don't care about astronomy. Politicians are driven by policy; find "hooks" to attach our desires to policies that politicians care about (e.g., education).
2. Speak up! Senior scientists don't have a monopoly on good ideas, but they do have the ability to amplify good ideas that they encounter.
3. Outreach works best either through individual contact in small groups, or through large, popular one-off events with "celebrities".

Session summary/notes

- 1) When interacting with government, dress and act professionally.
- 2) Politicians (generally) don't care about astronomy specifically; find something they do care about (a policy goal) and tie astronomy to that.
- 3) Have the big picture in mind when interacting with politicians: "If I had a square kilometer of goats..." If you have a good idea that the astronomical community could support, speak up! Senior scientists don't have a monopoly on good ideas, but they do have the ability to amplify good ideas that they encounter. This applies beyond just interactions with government.
- 4) Government is made of human beings with many competing priorities. Find out how to identify with them.

Junior members in the government bureaucracy are essential – unless you somehow have influence with a high-ranking government official, you must convince their staffers of the importance of your message/request first. At the same time, be prepared to use one-off opportunities if they arise. Also keep in mind that governments will not react well to negative messages, unless you have millions of people on your side ("the nuclear option").

Many of these points apply to all levels of government, even down to the university level.

Public outreach can involve personal interactions with small groups, or large, splashy presentations. Both can be effective.

Decide if and how you want to use social media – primarily as a sink (to receive ideas/information from the community) or as a source (to post a lot and add to the conversations). To gain a following on, e.g., Twitter, persistent interesting content is required. Links to additional content can circumvent the limitations of the specific medium. Social media is not likely to positively affect your career unless you are a big name (e.g., AstroKatie). If you do use social media in a professional context a lot, choose your interactions carefully so that you do not get overwhelmed.

BICEP2 on Facebook & Twitter: the general consensus is that peer review-by-social media is a positive development, but the media frenzy stoked by the scientists was a bad idea, and can negatively impact the entire community. It was a problem of "phrasing" moreso than goals or content.