

The National Academies of SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

How to Strengthen News Coverage of Social and Behavioral Science

*Roundtable on the Communication and Use of Social and Behavioral Sciences
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*

August 9, 2016

Background and Goal

Over the past two decades, the evolution of communication technology and changes in the incentives of publishers and media organizations has transformed how scientific findings are conveyed to the public. Research findings are now spread with unprecedented speed—by traditional media reporters, bloggers, professional organizations and by researchers themselves.

This new environment offers many opportunities for private businesses, public officials, and others to use social and behavioral science to improve people's quality of life. Individual scholars and science organizations can post findings quickly and provide access to materials that can help people in the media - understand what the findings mean and how they might be applied. Providing this access can help the media increase the number of people who can understand and benefit from science.

But the path from social and behavioral scientific findings to public understanding and use is not always smooth. Some scholars may not know how to convey newsworthy content in a way that reporters can use. Some reporters may know too little about science to convey scientific information accurately. And people in both communities may have incentives to sensationalize some scientific findings. When science is not accurately conveyed, people may be deprived of opportunities to understand potentially life-improving information. Since policy makers, their staffs, and the public often obtain science information from media sources, it is critical for scholars and everyone in the media to recognize the challenges to effective communication. Part of meeting this challenge is recognizing what types of social and behavioral scientific information and the narratives about them are and are not newsworthy, how to construct those narratives in ways that are accessible to the people who will write about them, and how to construct those narratives in ways that accurately convey what scientists have discovered. To achieve this goal, scholars and scientific institutions need a better understanding of the incentives and opportunities facing the media who are trying to provide accurate information about science.

This seminar seeks to address the following question: *How can all of us in the social and behavioral sciences help researchers and people in the media accurately convey the findings from social and behavioral science research?*

The seminar's purpose is to improve the identification of newsworthy social and behavioral science and how it is reported through all media. Invited speakers include social and behavioral scientists experienced in communicating science, leading journalists and other media and organizations that use social science in their reporting, and academic experts in uses of media for science communication. The goal is for all participants to learn about how individual researchers, science-based organizations, and people in the media can more effectively work together to convey socially valuable information that benefits the public.

To set the context, an opening panel will set the context by describing from different vantage points the opportunities for and approaches to communicating social and behavioral science in a changing and complex communication environment. The next panel will highlight recent examples of social and behavioral science research that received accurate media coverage and offer explanations of how this coverage was achieved. During a working lunch, participants will meet in small groups and exchange proposals about how to help people who produce potentially newsworthy social and behavioral science information do so accurately and effectively. Afternoon panels will focus on the perspective of people who produce social and behavioral science content for some leading publications. They will discuss how they get social and behavioral science information, how they use it, and their views of how researchers and scientific organizations could help them do their important jobs more effectively and efficiently.

The seminar will culminate with a focus group style discussion of actions that individuals and organizations in the scientific community could take in the short and long term to improve the identification of newsworthy social and behavioral research and how it is reported in the media.

Tentative Agenda

8:45 Welcome and Introduction

Arthur Lupia, *University of Michigan* (Roundtable Chair)

Mary Ellen O'Connell, Deputy Executive Director, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (DBASSE), National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine

9:00 Setting the Stage

Moderator: Olivia Morgan, *Common Sense Media* (Roundtable Member)

9:00-9:10 Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC), University of Pennsylvania*

Dr. Jamieson will describe the ways in which the APPC has succeeded in drawing media attention to important social and behavioral science studies and the steps that APPC has taken to generate accurate coverage of its findings. Brian Lin, *EurekAlert!*

9:10-9:20 Mr. Lin will draw on examples of how AAAS has engaged with news coverage of social and behavioral science to illustrate the unique issues that arise in the coverage of SBS, how these have been approached, and important issues to address for the future.

9:20-9:30 Kellina Craig-Henderson, *Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate, National Science Foundation*

Dr. Craig-Henderson will describe the agency's goals for communicating social and behavioral science and the approaches being used to reach diverse audiences with important research findings.

9:30-10:00 Discussion

10:00 Case Study: Media Coverage of the Reproducibility Project in Psychology

Moderator: Howard Kurtzman, *American Psychological Association* (Roundtable Member)

10:00-10:15 Brian Nosek, *Center for Open Science* and the Reproducibility Project: Psychology

10:15-10:30 Richard Harris, *NPR*

10:30-10:45 TBA

10:45-11:45 Discussion

12:00-1:00 Working Lunch: Small Group Discussions

Participants should form small working groups to start an initial conversation on the two final discussion questions:

- What concrete actions can the individuals and organizations that communicate social and behavioral science take *in the next six months* to improve media reporting of newsworthy social and behavioral science?
- If these organizations had five years to develop training materials or infrastructure that would help scientists better understand what kind of content is newsworthy and how to facilitate accurate reporting?

1:00 Panel: How Do Journalists Decide What Social and Behavioral Science to Cover and How to Cover It

Moderator: Brian Baird, *4Pir2 Communications* (Roundtable Member)

Invited Panelists:

- Thomas Patterson, *Harvard Kennedy School, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy*, and *journalistsresource.org*
- John Sides, *George Washington University* and *The Washington Post's The Monkey Cage* blog
- Susan Pinker, *Wall Street Journal* Columnist

1:00-1:30 Each participant will give a 5-10 minute opening statement. We have asked the participants to address the following questions

- How do you determine what kinds of social and behavioral science information is newsworthy?
- When you need this information, where do you go to get it?
- When you seek this information, what attributes make it most useful to you?
- If you could change one thing about how social and behavioral scientists convey newsworthy information, what would it be?

1:30-2:30 Discussion

2:30 Panel: How Do Journalists Use Social and Behavioral Science?

Moderator: Camille Gamboa, *Sage Publications* (Roundtable Member)

Invited Panelists:

- Seth Borenstein, *Associated Press*
- Frank Sesno, *George Washington University*
- TBA

2:30-3:00 Each participant will give a 5-10 minute opening statement. We have asked the participants to address the following questions

- When do you most need information from the social and behavioral sciences?
- When you need this information, where do you go to get it?
- When you seek this information, what attributes make it most useful to you?
- If you could change one thing about how social and behavioral scientists convey newsworthy information, what would it be?

3:00-4:00 Discussion

Open Discussion: Proposals for Conveying Newsworthy Social and Behavioral Science

4:00-4:30 Moderators: Arthur Lupia and Sheri Roder, *Horizon Media* (Roundtable Member)

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Following the seminar, the roundtable members will lead drafting of a seminar summary and commentary for dissemination through social and behavioral science outlets and networks that will serve as the basis for subsequent activities.