

MAR11-2010-000899

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the MAR11 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Science Museum Resources and Partnerships for Public and K-12 Outreach and Engagement

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Science museums engage in a wide range of activities not apparent to exhibit hall visitors. Many of them can support research outreach to public and K-12 teachers and students. In addition to exhibits in science centers, and demonstrations on topics like electricity or cryogenics, science museums offer courses for children and adults, out-of-school programs for students, teacher professional development; some do K-12 curriculum development and some run science magnet schools. In recent years science museums have increased their capacity to communicate with the public about current research. The Museum of Science, for instance, created a Current Science and Technology Center in 2001 dedicated to science in the news and current research developments. Through this Center, the Museum partnered with Harvard University to provide a wide range of public engagement activities as part of Harvard's Nanoscale Science and Engineering Center focused on the Science of Nanoscale Systems and their Device Applications. In the past five years a number of new collaborations among science museums have developed, many in partnership with researchers and research centers. Perhaps the largest of these, the Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Net) was launched in 2005 with funding from the National Science Foundation. The NISE Net links informal science education organizations together and to university research centers to raise the capacity of all the participant organizations to increase public awareness, understanding, and engagement with nanoscale science, engineering, and technology. Nearly 300 informal educational organizations in every state nationwide make use of NISE Net's educational materials, professional development, national and regional meetings, and online resources. NISE Net is an open source network with all of its materials freely available to everyone.