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University/Science Center Collaborations (A Science Center Perspective): Developing an Infrastructure of Partnerships with Science Centers to Support the Engagement of Scientists and Engineers in Education and Outreach for Broad Impact

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Science centers, professional associations, corporations and university research centers share the same mission of education and outreach, yet come from “different worlds.” This gap may be bridged by working together to leverage unique strengths in partnership. Front-end evaluation results for the development of new resources to support these (mostly volunteer-based) partnerships elucidate the factors which lead to a successful relationship. Maintaining a science museum-scientific community partnership requires that all partners devote adequate resources (time, money, etc.). In general, scientists/engineers and science museum professionals often approach relationships with different assumptions and expectations. The culture of science centers is distinctly different from the culture of science. Scientists/engineers prefer to select how they will ultimately share their expertise from an array of choices. Successful partnerships stem from clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Scientists/engineers are somewhat resistant to the idea of traditional, formal training. Instead of developing new expertise, many prefer to offer their existing strengths and expertise. Maintaining a healthy relationship requires the routine recognition of the contributions of scientists/engineers. As professional societies, university research centers and corporations increasingly engage in education and outreach, a need for a supportive infrastructure becomes evident. Work of TryScience.org/VolTS (Volunteers TryScience), the MRS NISE Net (Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network) subcommittee, NRCEN (NSF Research Center Education Network), the IBM On Demand Community, and IEEE Educational Activities exemplify some of the pieces of this evolving infrastructure.