

To: NOAA Personnel

From: Paul Sandifer, PhD, Senior Science Advisor to the NOAA Administrator

Re: Submission of Symposium Proposals to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Meeting

Dear Colleagues,

Each year, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) hosts a national meeting that serves as a high-profile venue for a variety of scientists who are interested in the latest advances, interdisciplinary topics, and the confluence of science and society. Thousands of leading scientists, engineers, educators, and policy-makers, hundreds of members from national and international media, and science writers will be in attendance. Over the last 10 years, the number of ocean science symposia has been steadily increasing, making this meeting of particular interest to NOAA.

AAAS is the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of the journal *Science*. The next AAAS Annual Meeting will take place from Feb. 17-21, 2011 in Washington, D.C. Greater than 150 sessions are typically accepted and a small percentage are invited to participate in an AAAS-sponsored press briefing. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase NOAA and its partner's scientific achievements. Press briefings can draw upwards of 80 reporters.

To provide guidance on how to submit successful symposia to AAAS, I have invited Carolyn Sotka with NOAA's Oceans and Human Health Initiative (OHHI) to lead a Webex discussion on the topic. Carolyn and I have co-chaired several symposia that were awarded press briefings at AAAS, and she will share what factors need to be considered in order to develop a strong symposium proposal.

The theme for the 2011 Annual Meeting is "Science Without Borders," emphasizing science that utilizes interdisciplinary approaches and crosses conventional borders. The Program Committee is particularly interested in proposals that highlight the theme but also include groundbreaking areas of research, new developments, and cross-cutting activities in science, technology, and education.

Symposium proposal organizers are encouraged to be creative and to focus on the uniqueness and interdisciplinary nature of the Annual Meeting. Successful proposals are characterized by interesting topics that include capable and articulate presenters from a broad range of institutions, who are representative of the diversity of science and society. Instructions for symposium proposal submission can be found at: <http://aaas.confex.com/aaas/2011/cfp.cgi>

**The deadline for proposal submission is Tuesday, 27 April 2010 at 11:59 PM PT. While this is a relatively short time to pull together a symposium submission, the Webex presentation will provide helpful hints for taking advantage of this opportunity if your program is interested.**

The AAAS Webex: “Key to Submitting a Successful AAAS Symposium Proposal” will be held on **April 1, 2010 from 1:30-2:30PM**. The discussion will involve a short PowerPoint presentation, and a question and answer period will follow.

**Information for accessing the call-in and Webex is as follows:**

Meeting Date: 4/1/2010  
Meeting Time: 1:30PM EASTERN TIME

Call-in: 866-833-7307  
Participant passcode: 8986360

Webex Instant Net Conference Details:

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Meeting Number: 743900824  
Meeting Passcode: 6815431  
Meeting Host: Carolyn Sotka

Join Instructions for Instant Net Conference:

1. Join the meeting now:  
<http://www.mymeetings.com/nc/join.php?sigKey=mymeetings&i=743900824&p=6815431&t=c>
2. Enter the required fields.
3. Indicate that you have read the Privacy Policy.
4. Click on Proceed.

As you begin to think about your proposal, keep in mind that both journalists and a wide variety of scientists and educators will be in your audience; develop a catchy title, synopsis, and diverse speaker line-up that will stand out and be understandable and interesting to an audience outside of your field.

The AAAS Annual Meeting is an exciting venue and rewarding experience for highlighting advances in NOAA science, communication, and education. I highly encourage you to consider submitting a symposium proposal.

# The Key to Submitting a Successful AAAS Symposium Proposal

**Carolyn Sotka**

**Senior Science-Policy Analyst**

**NOAA's OHHI (NOS)**



# What is AAAS and Why Should I Care?

- AAAS is the world's largest general scientific society and publisher of *Science*.
- Annual Meeting showcases breakthrough science ranging from rocket science to deep thermal vents.
- Number of ocean symposia steadily rises each year.
- Hosts a very large press core of national and international media.
- Great opportunity to present NOAA science to a diverse audience and possibly receive press attention.



# The AAAS Annual Meeting Proposal Process

- Call for 2011 Symposia due Tuesday, 27 April 2010
- 2011 Theme is “Science Without Borders”
- Symposia are “pre-packaged” 3 or 6 speakers with co-chairs, discussants and/or moderators
- Prefer that speakers confirm their participation
- Include a synopsis, speaker affiliations, talk titles and 3-5 sentences about focus of talk
- The goal!
  - ◆ 1. Get into the meeting
  - ◆ 2. Be awarded a press briefing that leads to coverage of NOAA stories



# What Makes a Strong Symposium Proposal - “The Story”

- Tell a compelling story
- Synopsis and talks should hang together as a cohesive story
- Showcase new science
- Include hooks and catch phrases but make sure the science is strong
- Summarize findings but save “data” for abstracts
- Catchy titles a must
- Make timely and relevant to today’s news
- Link to annual meeting theme

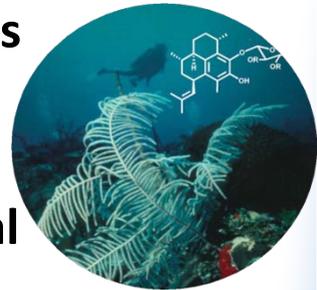


# OHHI Success Stories at AAAS



**Decoding the Secret Pathologies of Dolphins: Significance for Human and Ocean Health - 2010**

**Fighting the Rising Tide of Antibiotic Resistance: Causes and Cures in the Sea - 2009**



**From Kitchen Sinks to Ocean Basins: Emerging Chemical Contaminants and Human Health - 2008**

**Wave of the Future: Predicting Human Health Threats in Our Oceans - 2007**



**Marine Mammals on the Frontline: Indicators for Oceans and Human Health - 2006**

# What Makes a Strong Symposium Proposal - “The Speakers”

- 3 or 6 speakers per symposium - 90 or 180 minutes
- AAAS wants to see balance of speakers on many levels:
  - ◆ Multiple sectors (e.g., academic, government, and NGO) and disciplines
  - ◆ Range of “silver backs” to emerging “stars”
  - ◆ Should be “good speakers” and willing to work on it
  - ◆ Findings first and details later (but important!)
  - ◆ Co-chairs: Good to have at least one “semi” well known or respected science chair
  - ◆ No more than 3 out of 6 NOAA speakers

# Next Steps if Selected and Offered a Press Briefing

- AAAS Annual Meeting is a commitment and there are many deadlines to track!
- Several conference calls to make sure talks complement one another and take home messages
- Publications near date of meeting
- Story is embargoed until briefing date
- Draft a press release and work with your public affairs officer
- Leverage the coverage
- “Train” speakers to deliver their talks for this audience - **Make Take Home Message Loud and Clear**
- Help provide guidance to individual press statements
- At least one dry rehearsal and on-site

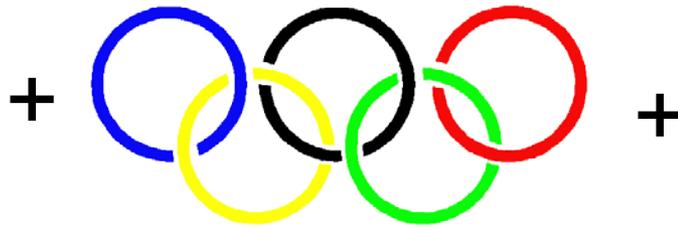


# NOS Case Study on 2010 AAAS Communications Roll-out

- Press package:
  - ◆ Press release: Joint or just NOAA
  - ◆ For NOAA scientists:
    - High resolution photos
    - Video links or B-roll (NOS Ocean Media Center)
    - Website Links
    - Media-targeted podcast
- Leverage with other NOAA Communications efforts in your LO
  - NOS Communications and Education Division
    - NOS Making Waves (audio podcast for general public)
    - Ocean Today Kiosk videos (in development)
    - News and feature stories on NOS Web site
    - Internal reporting



# The Bad News



**Domestic Terrorist Attack  
Killer Whale Attack**

+ **Cutbacks to U.S. Environmental Science Writers =**

**Less U.S. Newsprint Coverage for NOAA but....**

# The Good News

- Times are changing and media is being delivered to diverse audiences in diverse ways
  - ◆ Despite our 2010 perfect storm of media events:
    - Radio: NPR Science Friday, WBUR-FM,
    - TV: ABC-Charleston, WHIO-Ohio
    - US Newsprint: Charleston Post and Courier, Florida Times Union
    - Web coverage:
      - International: BBC News Online, Irish Times, London Financial Times, CBC News in Canada, and the London Telegraph.
      - National: US News and World Report, CBS News, New York Daily News, AOL News Online, Business Week
  - ◆ Within 48 hours after the press conference, we had found nearly 50 articles from major global media on the 'Dolphins' story.
  - ◆ We are still pitching the story and hope for more coverage



# Good Luck!

- [Carolyn.Sotka@noaa.gov](mailto:Carolyn.Sotka@noaa.gov) 843-762-8944
- For information on the on the NOS Communications and Education Division contact: [Carol.Kavanagh@noaa.gov](mailto:Carol.Kavanagh@noaa.gov)
- Contact your Line Office Communication Team to see if they have any media tool kits or other resources available
- Link for our OHHI 2010 “Dolphins” session:
  - ◆ <http://aaas.confex.com/aaas/2010/webprogram/Session1697.html>
- NOS Making Waves: Decoding the Secret Pathologies of Dolphins
  - ◆ <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/podcast/feb10/mw021810.mp3>
- Ocean Today Kiosk video: Medicines from the Sea (2009)
  - ◆ [http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/oceannewskiosk/videos/0205\\_Medicinesfromthesea.mov](http://www2.nos.noaa.gov/oceannewskiosk/videos/0205_Medicinesfromthesea.mov)



## **Intro Slide:**

**The Key to Submitting a Successful AAAS Symposium Proposal**  
**Carolyn Sotka Notes to Accompany Presentation**  
**Senior Science-Policy Analyst, Oceans and Human Health Initiative (NOS)**  
[Carolyn.Sotka@noaa.gov](mailto:Carolyn.Sotka@noaa.gov), 843-817-5971  
April 1, 2010

**Good morning and thank you all for calling in:** For those of you that don't know me, my name is Carolyn Sotka and I have worked the last 5 years with the Oceans and Human Health Initiative in NOS, although we have Centers of Excellence in OHH across 3 of the line offices including NOS, OAR and Fisheries. I help with strategic planning for our program and help lead our outreach efforts to the Hill, the public, other agencies and managers and stakeholders... and in this case of today's seminar the scientific community and media.

I'd like to do a quick roll call to know the diversity of folks that called in today so if everyone could quickly introduce himself or herself and what program they are representing it would be great.

As background as to why we are here I was asked by NOAA leadership to lead this overview of AAAS, because it hosts fantastic science annual meeting that showcases some of the best ocean science from around the world. Personally, I have been involved with the annual meeting for 8 years. In fact the first session that I put together was in my past life with COMPASS (Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea) and was chaired by both Dr. Lubchenco, a managing principle scientists for COMPASS a the time and Dr. Sandifer, who I met for the first time and today is now my supervisor.

Today is going to be fairly informal. I will pretty quickly run through the seminar slides (about 20 minutes) and we will likely mute the line just to drown out some of the background noise and then we will open for question and answer for the rest of the session. I have also invited a couple of comrades to share their experiences if I missed anything. We will end at 2:30 PM. So with that, lets turn to the first slide and this talk is exactly how you SHOULD NOT do presentation at AAAS, too many words! But since we want to make this available – it needed to be more like a manual rather than a visual presentation.

**Slide 2: What is AAAS and why should I care**

AAAS is the American Association for the Advancement of Science is the largest scientific society, and publish Science magazine. As a point of reference, Dr. Lubchenco was a past president of AAAS. Each year they host a national meeting that serves as a high-profile venue for a variety of participants interested in the latest breakthroughs in science ranging from rocket science to deep thermal sea vents.

Thousands of scientists, engineers, educators, and policy-makers, and hundreds national and international media and science writers attend.

Over the last 10 years, the number of ocean science symposia has been steadily increased; making this meeting of particular interest to NOAA and given that next year is in DC Feb. 17-21, 2011. I know a number of folks across NOAA have been involved in the past but we wanted to provide this primer for those that were less familiar with the meeting.

It is competitive in order to get in and around 150 sessions are typically accepted and around 10% percent are invited to participate in an AAAS-sponsored press briefing. This is an excellent opportunity to showcase NOAA and its partner's scientific achievements. Press briefings can draw upwards of 100 reporters from news print, to web, blogs, and radio and TV.

### **Slide 3: What is the The AAAS Annual Meeting Proposal Process**

The call for symposia is currently out and proposals are due April 27, 2010. This year's theme is science without borders and typically there is a lot of leeway with how you interpret the theme.

Proposals are accepted as pre-packaged bundle with speakers, co-chairs, and possibly discussant or moderator if you so chose. AAAS prefers that speakers be confirmed as part of the package.

Each symposium proposal includes a synopsis – which is the summary or abstract for your session, individual speaker titles and affiliations, and a few sentences about the foci of their talk.

The goal of the proposal is of course to get in to the meeting but also to be catchy and newsy enough to be asked to participate in a AAAS hosted press briefing. So how do you do this?

**Slide 4:** One of the most important factors is that you tell a story with your synopsis and that it hangs together well with all the speakers. The story should

be compelling and show case new science, and in fact it is best to time publications with the meeting, but not mandatory.

Really try to think out of the scientist box when telling your story. Include many hooks but make sure that the synopsis addresses new aspects and preliminary findings of the science. The actual data can come later in individual abstracts.

You want to make sure that your story is timely and relevant to today's news and a catchy title is very important along with linking to the meeting theme.

**Slide 5:** Here are some samples of OHHI titles from the last 5 years of Dr. Sandifer and my involvement in the AAAS annual meeting. The 4 that are in bold were awarded a press conferences. The one not in bold was about ocean technologies and in general was not very well received. Charismatic megafauna are always a hit!

**Decoding the Secret Pathologies of Dolphins: Significance for Human and Ocean Health - 2010**

**Fighting the Rising Tide of Antibiotic Resistance: Causes and Cures in the Sea - 2009**

**From Kitchen Sinks to Ocean Basins: Emerging Chemical Contaminants and Human Health - 2008**

Wave of the Future: Predicting Human Health Threats in Our Oceans - 2007

Our first formal OHHI submission was in 2006 -

**Marine Mammals on the Frontline: Indicators for Oceans and Human Health** and in part helped inform the Pulitzer Prize winning LA Times series Altered Oceans by the great ocean science writer Ken Weiss.

**Slide 6: What Makes a Strong Symposium Proposal - "The Speakers"**

The other important factor of a strong symposium proposal is the speakers. Symposia come in two flavors, either 3 speakers for a 90 minute symposium or 6 for 180 minute symposium.

It is extremely important to AAAS that the sessions are diverse, and include multiple sectors (e.g., academic, government, and NGO) and disciplines, and range of scientists at different stages in their careers. The well-known silver backs and the emerging stars.

Ideally you want speakers that really connect with their audiences and are "quote – unquote good speakers" or someone who's style and delivery will resonate with

an audience. And really important is a willingness to have some level of communications training. It is a painful process but even the most highly esteemed scientists benefit from a good training session.

AAAS is a different type of scientific meeting in that they really want to see the bottom line first. A typical scientist wants to tell you every detail about their study and then at the end – the finding. AAAS wants the findings up front and loud and clear.

It never hurts to have a well-known and respected co-chair if it is your first time submitting.

And again, you can stack your session with NOAA reps but no more than half. In our case, because we have an external grant program mainly in the academic sector we are able to turn to that community and still showcase the OHHI program.

The speakers are really key because if they fall flat so will the story

#### **Slide 7: Next Steps if Selected and Offered a Press Briefing**

Ok, So you write a great proposal and get in! And your proposal is so good that you get asked to participate in the press briefing! You will need to suggest your top speakers normally 3-4 or AAAS will request their top choices. Buckle in because the press briefing experience is a pretty big commitment.

Make sure you get your speakers talking to one another and hold several conference calls about nailing down the key take home messages.

Encourage your speakers to try and shoot for publication dates by the press release but know that the “story” is under embargo until your press briefing. Meaning that you can’t sell it ahead of time, but can share with trusted reporters who agree to the embargo.

Next step is to draft a press release, and work with your public affairs officer to refine it. They are really the experts in pitching the story to the media so be prepared for your draft to be heavily edited and ask them for samples for reference.

Try to leverage the coverage within your LO, and I will provide a case study on this in a minute.

Those involved in the briefing will need to do a press statement – a 3-4 minute written statement that summarizes their talk and findings. This is in addition to the press release.

In order to refine the press statement, you will need to do a communication training with your speakers, and help them hone in on their take home messages. Plan on at least one dry rehearsal of the press briefing and on site. We always do this the night before and it is incredible after so much preparation how critical this fine-tuning is.

**Slide 8:** This last year we had a fantastic collaborative effort in NOS to pull off our press briefing. Our press package included a press release (public affairs officer – in this John Ewald); and for NOAA scientists we included B-roll (which is footage – but together by the Ocean Media Center); photos; program websites and numerous parallel efforts within NOS and the NOS Communication and Education Division such as an audio podcast by Troy Kitch; web cover story by Pam Rubin and an Ocean Today Kiosk video which will begin production this spring (Kate Nielsen is the NOS liaison for that wider NOAA effort).

**Slide 9:** So, you get through all these hoops and then guess what! You could be out shown by other sessions they receive all the attention or worse some major media events happen.

For example, the few days around our briefing, included Tiger Woods made his formal apology after months of seclusion, Shawn White won the gold in the half pipe, the a plane was flown intentionally into the IRS building in Austin, Texas and an attack at Sea World lead to a tragic death of a trainer by a killer whale.

This combined with so many newspapers going under, and many U.S. science writers being moved off their environmental news beat --- Created a perfect storm of media events around our session's debut

**Slide 10: The Good News**

But the good news is that despite this - times are changing and the story went viral on the Web and we still got an enormous amount of coverage.

For example, one really fun coverage was each year NPR Science Friday broadcasts live from AAAS and they pick 2 sessions out of the whole meeting to participate! And they picked ours, which was a great experience!

We had a few TV news clips, and two print articles.

Within only a few hours after the 'Dolphins' News Conference, articles were appearing in top international outlets, such as BBC News Online, Irish Times, London Financial Times, CBC News in Canada, the London Telegraph and was translated into 11 different languages.

Additionally, we saw articles in domestic Web sites like US News and

World Report, CBS News, New York Daily News, AOL News Online, Business Week, just to name a few.

Within 48 hours after the press conference, we had found nearly 50 articles from major global media on the 'Dolphins' story.

And we are still in the process of pitching the story and making it even more widely available, because we have such a strong press package and still have an opportunity to sell it to the U.S. market.

**Slide 11: Good luck**

In conclusion, and I hope I didn't bore you to tears with no pictures, the AAAS annual meeting is a great opportunity and really a fantastic meeting to attend as well. And it is not rocket science to get into! It is a lot of work though.

I have provided a couple of examples of our 2010 session proposal (see link), the audio podcast, and the 2009 ocean kiosk link. Also my contact and Carol Kavanagh (head of NOS Communication and Education Division) contact who could direct you if you have questions regarding NOS outreach products.

So I wish you all success and would like to have some folks on stand-by to help answer any questions – John Ewald, the NOS public affairs, or Carol Kavanagh and NOS Tim Tomastik who helped pull off our session in 2009. Or if any of you would like to add something or if I missed anything please jump in.

And with that lets turn it over for questions!  
Thank you for your time!