One hundred and seven researchers, faculty members and public information officers from across the state recently attended the NSF Science: Becoming the Messenger workshop in Norman to learn how to effectively communicate scientific research to individuals outside of academia. The event was sponsored by the National Science Foundation, Oklahoma Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (OK EPSCoR) and the National Weather Center.

With funding agencies placing stronger emphasis on broader impacts criterion and researchers competing for a limited number of grant dollars, it is becoming increasingly important for scientists to learn how to share the “man-on-the-street” relevance of their research with citizens and legislators.

Alan I. Leshner, executive publisher of Science magazine and CEO of AAAS, was quoted in a 2009 news release as saying, “Issues at the intersection of science and society—from human embryonic stem cell research to evolution, and from the study of “personal” topics such as sexual behaviors, to global climate change and vaccine development—may also drive some scientists to hone their presentation skills. At the same time, a weak economy may tend to prompt researchers and the lay public alike to become increasingly aware of the relationship between scientific capacity and national prosperity.”

“Everyone needs a fundamental understanding and comfort with science and technology in order to prosper in a modern society. It’s also true that communication between science and society must be positive and strong in order for science to thrive,” said Leshner.

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NSF assembled an impressive team of communicators and trainers at the workshop to help members of the scientific community become more effective messengers, including Emmy award-winning television producer Joe Schreiber, bestselling science author Chris Mooney, and Buffy Cushman-Patz, NSF’s Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow.

Researchers attending the conference learned how to craft a message and effectively deliver it to a variety of audiences. Live interview training, video production best practices, public presentation and new media skills were also highlighted.

A special breakout session for public information officers was designed to build collaboration between PIOs and NSF Public Affairs.

Seventeen researchers were invited to attend a second day of training, where they learned to further refine their messages and honed skills that will enable them to talk more effectively to their colleagues, public audiences and the media. PBS television was on-site on day two of the workshop to interview Mooney and a researcher participant for a future broadcast.

Dana Topousis, NSF’s head of media and public affairs, has said, “The world is changing so much. We’re finding it ever-more important for researchers to be able to communicate with audiences that may not understand their research, and to be able to speak on their own behalf. Researchers themselves need to be able to communicate their work to generate broad public support for their goals.”

In addition, Topousis said, NSF works to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers, and the best role models are today’s leading researchers.

The Norman workshop has provided Oklahoma researchers and PIOs with communication tools to help them effectively meet the increasingly diverse communications needs of this century.
More than 625 women entrepreneurs gathered to “Join the Entrepreneurial Revolution” at the second Women Entrepreneurs Inspire Conference at the Cox Convention Center on April 5 in Oklahoma City. The conference was designed to encourage women to pursue their passions, think big and turn their dreams into reality by exploring the unique challenges and demands women face when creating and expanding their own business ventures.

“Entrepreneurship is the key to revitalizing Oklahoma’s economy, and women are leading the charge,” said Nola Miyasaki, Norman C. Stevenson chair and director for OSU’s Riata Center. “Today, an estimated 50 percent of small businesses are owned by women, and for the past two decades women-owned firms have grown at twice the rate of all other firms.

WE Inspire 2011 was an exciting opportunity for inspiration, networking and tapping into the participants’ entrepreneurial potential. The energy and the networking that went on at this event were truly amazing.”

The conference included an introduction by Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, 30 presentations from leading women entrepreneurs across the continent. Attendees participated in breakout sessions on technology and social entrepreneurship, and hands-on sessions that examined a range of practical issues to enable women to act on their ambitions, Miyasaki said. The breakouts included two tracks: start-up and growth. The start-up track focused on creating ventures, while the growth track emphasized ways to grow existing ventures. Twenty one exhibitors hosted booths at the conference. Miyasaki said the conference was a motivating event that hopefully helped Oklahoma businesswomen find the courage to create goals and pursue their dreams.

“Courage is in many ways the foundation of entrepreneurial success,” Miyasaki said. “It enables us to take a leap of faith, to believe in ourselves and to keep going when times are tough. For women entrepreneurs, finding courage and using it to dream big dreams and to follow those dreams will be the key to starting new businesses and to growing bigger and more vibrant businesses in Oklahoma.”

The event was hosted by OSU’s Riata Center. Sponsoring organizations included the Oklahoma Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (OK EPSCoR), Stillwater National Bank, and others.

For more information, visit www.entrepreneurship.okstate.edu/riata.
The Oklahoma Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (OK EPSCoR) was established by the National Science Foundation in 1985 to strengthen Oklahoma’s exploration and growth in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. OK EPSCoR’s central goal is to increase the state’s research competitiveness through strategic support of research instruments and facilities, research collaborations, and integrated education and research programs.

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