A Report on the New Mexico Informal Science Network Meeting
September 5-7, 2012 at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge

Report submitted by: Charles H. Walter, Director, New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science

Synopsis

Representatives from nine New Mexico science museums and one representative from New Mexico state parks met to dialogue about the possibility of creating a network of informal science institutions that would help build institutional capacity and develop an educational infrastructure across the state to support greater public understanding of science and current EPSCoR research. The two days were spent learning more about the work of each institution present, learning about other informal science networks, and developing initial ideas about the work of the network. Ultimately, all of the institutions present voiced enthusiasm for continued work on developing a statewide network, with the caveat that two of the group felt they needed to get approval from their directors to continue.

Report

On September 5-7, 2012, representatives from 10 informal science education institutions met that the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge Field Station to explore the possibility of creating a statewide informal science education network. The goals of this meeting were to 1) Learn more about each institution attending, 2) Learn more about informal science networks by examining various network models, 3) Introduce all present to New Mexico EPSCoR and its research agenda, and 4) Determine the feasibility of creating an informal science network in the state of New Mexico. Institutions represented at the meeting were:

- New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science
- Explora!
- National Museum of Nuclear Science and History
- Santa Fe Children's Museum
- Bradbury Science Museum
- New Mexico State Parks
- Farmington Museum
- Las Cruces Museum of Natural History
- New Mexico Space History Museum
- Western Heritage Museum Complex

These institutions provide a great array of assets that can support science leaning including their facilities, collections, staff, volunteers, exhibits, space to host traveling exhibitions, and natural resources. Staff sizes at these institutions range from 4 to 70.

Meeting attendees were encouraged to think specifically about how the creation of a statewide network could help their individual institution. When asked what one thing they would personally want to get out of a network, attendees answered[1]:

- Professional development for ISE staff, building on capacity in the state
- Community for isolated educators
- Being in the same room as other ISEs
- Time to think (guided questions and dialogue)
- Interface with formal education
- A voice for ISE
- Borrow ideas
- Share resources
- Get national speakers
- Expand science across the curriculum
- Maintain continuity with older kids
- Annual impact report on STEM statewide from network members
- Connection to researchers at EPSCoR
- Access to cutting edge energy research
- Researcher information and meetings
- Providing the public access and ed help to scientists and forming scientific collaborations
- How can this network make each of us stronger? Staff professional development, maintaining communication
- A calendar of all the statewide public programs
- Getting followers that attend many of these events
- Exhibit creation with multiple input and venue opportunities
- Staging with this LTER also helps get next opportunities

In summary a statewide network is seen as a vehicle to create a learning community of professionals, increase professional development opportunities, connect our work, better communicate and expand the impact of our work across the state.

The group brainstormed potential funding sources, and ideas included corporate (Intel, Space Port – Virgin Galactic, Carsten, Target, Southwest Airlines, Lockheed Martin), the big labs and their contractors (SNL, LANL), and Foundations/Non-Profits (NSF, Innovate Educate, Changetheequation.oeg).

---

[1] List taken from Selena Connealy's notes from workshop Wrap-up Session

Finally, the group discussed next steps. The following ideas were generated[2]:

- Send someone from our group to visit the Texas network.
- One day meeting and invite some other participants
- Develop goals and mission statement.
- Mission Statement ideas: public education and engagement, support scientists by making his/her work accessible, museum as nexus for teachers, scientists and communities
- Provide professional development for ISEs.
- Learn more about the Portal to the Public—conduct a workshop for network.
- Hold a phone conference/webinar to:
  1. connect partners
  2. listen to guest speaker
  3. Theme discussion question
- Use technology to communicate without having to physically meet, EPSCOR listserve set up by Selena with email
- Visit other network members' institutions, staff swap/exchange, Field exchange program for staff with application process
- Conduct training on inflatable StarLab planetarium with digital setup
- Figure out a systemic approach to reach maximum
- Define disseminate nm EPSCoR research focus. Should it be a goal to improve formal science? Each site defines how to use EPSCOR
- Intro to EPSCOR scientists. How to get info on the science...
- Not enough science in Hobbs so providing access for teachers and students
- Identify mechanisms for cooperation and sharing of scientists
- Energy training?
- Hub for NSF scientists public outreach

From the variety of ideas presented, it is my recommendation that the best next step would be to convene a one-day meeting in Albuquerque to 1) refine the mission and goals statements for the network, 2) tour one network member's site, and 3) meet an EPSCoR scientist and learn about their work. Funding for those traveling from a distance could come from savings realized from the original IWG grant due to a consultant having to cancel plans to attend at the last minute due to a death in the family. Another important aspect of the meeting will be to explore and/or demonstrate a technology platform to foster ongoing communication.

With a stronger sense of mission and goals, one site visit under their belt, and the chance to interact with an EPSCoR scientist, members of the emerging network will have a clearer understanding of what is possible in the years ahead.

---

[2] List taken from Selena Connealy's notes from workshop Wrap-up Session