



# **TRAINING SCIENTISTS TO MAKE THE RIGHT MOVES**

**A Practical Guide to Developing Programs  
in Scientific Management**

**Burroughs Wellcome Fund  
Howard Hughes Medical Institute**

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## Chapter 6

# FINDING AND WORKING WITH SPEAKERS

### In This Chapter

Finding Good Speakers

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Preparing Your Speakers

## FINDING GOOD SPEAKERS

The wisdom on finding speakers—especially ones who will speak for free—can be distilled as follows:

- ❖ Be resourceful.
- ❖ Network.
- ❖ Just ask.
- ❖ Ask early.

### Places to Look for Speakers

There are myriad places to find qualified people who will speak at your event without breaking your budget. Here are some ideas to start your search:

- ❖ Begin with friends and colleagues at your own university or professional society, and then broaden out to include local employers and chambers of commerce. Local biotech and pharmaceutical companies are also places to find speakers.
- ❖ Revisit the resource list you developed when you started the planning process (see page 16, “People Who Can Help”). If you’re at a university, try the technology transfer office (a source of contacts for local start-up businesses), the career center, and other offices that typically invite speakers to campus.
- ❖ Look places you might not otherwise. Many senior administrators who don’t normally lecture—provosts, deans, associate deans, and directors of institutes—are informative and polished speakers.
- ❖ Check out alumni databases. For training grant submissions in many disciplines, some funding agencies and universities require reporting on employment outcomes of recipients of their grants. Call alumni and ask whether they have any suggestions. In fact, alumni are often eager to be speakers themselves as a way of giving back to their alma maters.
- ❖ If you have already conducted training activities, consider asking participants of previous activities for suggestions or to serve as speakers themselves. They will be familiar with your goals and materials.

### Tip

Think broadly about who at your university or society might be involved in providing career development training. For example, the people who put together new faculty orientation seminars, “possibilities in our field” events for undergraduates, or “preparing future faculty” programs may have a roster of good speakers to share.

### It Never Hurts to Ask

*“For a career panel in Research Triangle Park, when I needed a Ph.D. scientist who had interviewed other Ph.D. scientists, I went to my undergraduate alma mater’s alumni database and typed in ‘North Carolina.’ There I found someone in the area who had a Ph.D. and who graduated the same year I did. I cold-called him and introduced myself as a fellow alumnus. His tone turned from a ‘Who is this calling me?’ to a ‘Hmm, this is someone I have something in common with, so I’ll bear what she has to say.’ He listened, suggested his boss, and the next thing I knew, I had my panelist.”*

—Lisa Kozlowski, Thomas Jefferson University

### Improving the Odds That You’ll Have a Good Speaker

The most important qualities of good speakers are their knowledge of the subject and their ability to engage an audience. This is how you can find potential speakers who meet both these qualifications:

- ❖ Be on the lookout for good speakers when you attend conferences and seminars. When you come across good speakers or people who might know one, collect business cards, introduce yourself, explain what you do, and keep in touch.
- ❖ Ask all your friends and colleagues for possible leads. Make sure that either you or someone whose judgment you trust has seen the speaker in action. Whenever possible, supplement referrals by attending events where prospective speakers are giving talks so you can hear them in person. If you cannot attend the speakers’ presentations, take a look at their CVs to see if they have experience in teaching or giving talks, and try to talk to them by phone to get a sense of their communication skills.
- ❖ Give your speakers as much information as possible about your training event and try to gauge their level of enthusiasm and commitment to it.

### Tip

Although it is nice to have an in-demand, well-known scientist as a speaker, it may be better to have a lesser-known scientist who is dynamic and committed to speaking at your event and who will put in the time necessary to make the session a success. In addition, sometimes a more junior faculty member—for example, someone who has just been awarded tenure—may have more relevant things to say to your target audience than a senior-level scientist.

### Narrowing Your Choice

Once you have a list of potential speakers, you need to narrow the field. The suggestions below on how to proceed come from a cross-section of people responsible for creating training programs in scientific management. For each topic, workshop, or session:

- ❖ Consider any budgetary constraints that will be a factor in narrowing down your list of speakers.
- ❖ Rank your top candidates on the basis of comments from other people or your own assessment of the speakers.
- ❖ Make sure you have diversified your speaker portfolio. Look at your list of names and pick people with differences in experience (professional background and communication style) and career stage (e.g., senior versus junior faculty). Demographics—gender, age, and marital and parental status—also can be relevant aspects of diversity, for example, for a panel about balancing home and work life. Differences in cultural perspectives should also be taken into consideration, for example, in a panel session on mentoring. If you do not have enough diversity, ask around for additional referrals.
- ❖ Reassess your choices on the basis of who accepts your invitation. For example, if two women accept the invitation to sit on a three-person panel, you will probably want a male speaker for the third slot.

### A BIT ABOUT SPEAKERS' FEES

You will probably find at least some knowledgeable, engaging speakers from among your colleagues and contacts who will not expect remuneration beyond travel costs (However, you may want to give these speakers a gift, say, a bookstore gift certificate, as a way of saying thank you.)

If you end up having to pay some speakers an honorarium, you should decide on the amount on the basis of your budget and what you are asking the speakers to do, and communicate that figure to the speakers when you first approach them. Typical honoraria for speakers from academia run from about \$300 to \$1,000, depending on whether travel is involved and the extent of the speaker's participation in the training program. Professional consultants, on the other hand, will charge anything along a continuum of, say, \$350 total for three hours to more than \$600 per hour. Consultants usually state their fees up front, but if they do not, it is your job to ask. Some consultants have an all-inclusive flat fee; others charge for travel time, preparation work, or both. To avoid unpleasant surprises when the bill arrives, you need to know not only the fee but how it is calculated—everything the speaker considers billable time.

## COMMUNICATING WITH SPEAKERS

### Inviting Speakers

Once you have made your choices, it is time to formally invite speakers to participate in your program. No matter what information has been exchanged up to this point, a formal letter of invitation gives you a good opportunity to lay out (or repeat) important details for the speaker and what you want back from that person. It generally includes:

- ❖ The goal of the session and the overall goal of the course or program
- ❖ Date and time of the session
- ❖ Who the audience will be and its level of knowledge of the topic
- ❖ Who the other speakers will be (particularly if you are inviting a speaker to be on a panel), if this information is available
- ❖ A preliminary list of topics you want the speaker to cover
- ❖ The honorarium, if any
- ❖ Travel and housing details, if applicable
- ❖ A request of written confirmation

### Tip

If you are holding a multisession course, encourage your speakers to stay for the entire event, if your budget allows it. The participants will benefit from the interactions with the speakers and from hearing their comments during the other sessions.

### Speaker Confirmation

After the speakers have signed on for your event, you should send them a confirmation letter that reiterates the date and time of their session and the length of their presentation. If available, you may want to attach a preliminary agenda and a summary of the speaker's session that contains its learning objectives. You also may want to attach a list of important dates (e.g., deadlines for submitting an outline for the presentation and PowerPoint slides, making hotel reservations). Remember, it is always a good idea to let speakers know as far in advance as possible what is expected of them.

In this communication, ask speakers to verify contact information, including their degrees and titles, and to supply a biographical sketch. Explain your speaker reimbursement policies and, if speakers are coming from out of town, how they should make their arrangements for travel and hotel accommodations. Find out whether they require wheelchair or walker access to rooms, dais, or lectern and whether they have any special dietary restrictions or requirements or a medical condition of which you need to be aware.

### Tip

If possible, talk to the speakers' administrative assistants or office managers to make sure your event is on their calendars.

Sample speaker invitation and confirmation letters can be found in the resources at <http://www.hhmi.org/labmanagement>. For more on hammering out the logistical details of speakers' hotel and travel arrangements and presentations, see chapter 8, "Making It Happen."

## Tip

You should ask speakers for written permission to make copies of their presentations available to attendees and, if applicable, to be photographed, videotaped, or audiotaped. If you intend to disseminate their materials or presentations (either on the Web or in print), make sure you get permission for this as well.

## PREPARING YOUR SPEAKERS

There is widespread agreement about the benefits of giving speakers some guidance about what people in the audience want and need. How much guidance you give is a matter of personal preference and your comfort level with the speakers and their understanding of your milieu. Here is what some training organizers say about the orientation of speakers:

- ❖ You can and should be very explicit about what points you want covered. It is a good idea to provide speakers with a written list of the session objectives and suggested talking points, then follow up with a phone call or meet with speakers in person to discuss their talks (also see page 53, "Avoiding Overlap Among Speakers"). Remember though that involving speakers in decisions about session content also makes for a better session.
- ❖ Educate your speakers about the audience. For example, let them know the career level of the audience and their degrees and whether they are working in academia or industry.

### It's Your Job to Stay Involved

*"Don't assume your work is done because you've recruited the best speaker for a given session. You'll need to assume responsibility for assisting your speaker with background on the attendees and the program goals. Plan to review the speaker's program content well in advance."*

—Joan Lakoski, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

- ❖ Review the format of the session with the speakers and make clear to them the amount of time allotted for their presentations.
- ❖ Let speakers know if you want them to bring PowerPoint slides or other visual aids (e.g., a speaker on a panel might be embarrassed if the other panelists have PowerPoint slides and he or she does not). It is also a good idea to let speakers know the arrangement of the room where they will be speaking as well as the audiovisual equipment that will be available.

If you intend to duplicate the speakers' PowerPoint slides or other training materials for distribution on-site, set a due date for receipt of these materials before the event, and be sure to follow up with those who are late in submitting their materials.



### How far in advance should I ask speakers to submit their presentations?

Views differ on this. You could ask speakers to submit their presentations two to three weeks in advance so you have plenty of time to make copies to hand out. However, in those intervening weeks speakers will have time to make changes to their presentations and, if they do, you will have to decide if you want to rush around on the day of the event making copies of their revised material. An alternative is to set the submission deadline two or three days before the event and make it clear that any changes will not be reflected in the handouts.

### The Importance of Science-Speak

For some sessions, you may have speakers from outside the scientific community, probably consultants who are familiar with certain aspects of management but not necessarily in the context of scientific research. In such cases, you will need to spend more time orienting the speaker to your participants' needs, expectations, and frame of reference, so that he or she will have credibility with the target audience.

### Make Information Relevant to Scientists

*“You have to understand the needs and experiences of audiences composed of scientists at various stages of their careers and find ways to maximize receptiveness to material among listeners who are explicitly trained to question everything. Young scientists are dependent on material being presented in their own language. If it's not immediately apparent how the content relates to their world, much information will be lost. If you use the wrong jargon, you can quickly lose two-thirds of the people in the room.”*

—Leslie Sprunger, Washington State University

### Orienting an Outsider

*“When I found a local consultant to address balancing work and life issues, I had her meet with struggling postdocs and faculty before she structured her presentation.”*

—Joan Lakoski, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

*“For a session on conflict resolution, I used a specialist who runs a retreat center. She is not a scientist and had never been involved in university research. I invited her to come to the campus before her session. The first time, she met with me; the second time, she met with focus groups of postdocs. During her visits, she learned a great deal about different issues that arise in a lab setting, such as authorship disputes. Her session was highly relevant, and she was outstanding. Now we always educate our speakers about our populations and expectations.”*

—Melanie Sinche, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill

### Avoiding Overlap Among Speakers

A modest dose of repetition can help audiences absorb and retain the material taught, but you should strive to give all speakers their own distinct “turf” to cover. Experienced training organizers offer the following tips for minimizing overlap:

- ❖ For a panel session, schedule a meeting or conference call that involves all the speakers. Ask them to share outlines of their talks and discuss where overlap is important and where to make changes. Ask the speakers to provide you with a final outline of their talks.
- ❖ Ask speakers to send their preliminary slide presentations to you several weeks before the training so that you can review the content of their presentations and speakers will have time to make changes if necessary. If speakers are part of a panel, have them send their presentations to each other as well so that everyone can take a look and take steps to minimize (or eliminate) unnecessary overlap.
- ❖ For a multisession training event, provide a schedule of all sessions so that speakers can see how their presentations complement other sessions; this will also help to avoid omissions and minimize redundant remarks. Ask staff who are developing the sessions to compare notes to make sure that what a speaker is covering in one session isn't the main focus of another session.

