ENGAGING SCIENTISTS IN NASA EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH: INFORMAL SCIENCE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH. K. LaConte¹, A. J. P. Jones¹,², L. Bartolone³, and M. Nichols³, ¹Lunar and Planetary Institute (3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058, laconte@lpi.usra.edu), ²NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, 8800 Greenbelt Road, Greenbelt, MD 20771, andrea.j.jones@nasa.gov, ³Adler Planetarium, 1300 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605, lbartolone@adlerplanetarium.org, mnichols@adlerplanetarium.org

NASA’s Education and Public Outreach Forums: The NASA Science Education and Public Outreach Forums support the NASA Science Mission Directorate (SMD) and its education and public outreach (E/PO) community through a coordinated effort to enhance the coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness of SMD-funded E/PO programs.

The Planetary Science E/PO Forum helps SMD support planetary scientists currently involved in E/PO. The Forum also assists scientists who are interested in becoming involved in E/PO efforts in finding ways to do so through a variety of avenues. Here, we present opportunities for the planetary science community to participate in collaborations supporting NASA SMD efforts in informal science education and outreach.

What are informal science education and outreach? Informal education encompasses free-choice learning opportunities provided outside of the classroom. It is primarily based on education standards or content-focused learning objectives and is created and/or conducted by qualified informal education practitioners, benefiting informal educators, the general public, and/or groups specifically targeted for education and promoting life-long learning. Informal learning environments can include museums, science centers, planetariums, afterschool programs, libraries, science clubs, and other settings.

Outreach consists of public relations / engagement focused on raising awareness and interest, primarily supporting objectives that are affective in nature. Outreach programs are created and/or conducted by qualified outreach practitioners, and benefit the general public and/or groups specifically targeted for engagement. Outreach events may take place in formal or informal learning environments or public settings. Some examples of outreach include public lectures, family science nights, and launch or landing events.

Both informal education and outreach afford scientists rich and varied opportunities to connect with audiences.

The Forums and informal science education and outreach: SMD has established the Informal Education Working Group to help inform education efforts of the SMD E/PO community, including scientists. The Working Group:

- Conducted a review of pertinent education literature that is housed on the SMD E/PO Community workspace (http://smdepo.org; selected references are collected here: http://bit.ly/1koSllm)
- Assessed informal educators’ needs through literature reviews and surveys of professional informal educators
- Identified and coordinated NASA resources and opportunities for informal educators
- Offered professional development to the SMD E/PO community about the needs of and opportunities for working with informal education practitioners

Scientists interested in working in informal education and outreach learning environments are invited to access these resources and to contact the Planetary Science E/PO Forum to learn more about opportunities for getting involved and for ensuring the greatest impact of their efforts.

Why should scientists get involved with informal science education and outreach? Scientists are the holders of current, accurate scientific knowledge and can transfer ownership of science to the public by increasing access to scientific thought and discovery. Informal science education and outreach venues provide opportunities for scientists to get involved in education with generally enthusiastic audiences through programs that often do not require a large time commitment. These venues can provide wide reach to many different audiences, helping to increase the science literacy of the public.

Forum contacts: Learn how to join in our collaborative efforts to reach the informal science education and outreach communities based upon mutual needs and interests! Members of the Planetary Science E/PO Forum are happy to help if you have questions or would like more information. Contact the Planetary Science Informal Education Working Group Member Keliann LaConte (laconte@lpi.usra.edu) or the Planetary Science Scientist Engagement Lead Sanlyn Buxner (buxner@psi.edu), or browse the Forum’s online community workspace at http://smdepo.org.