

Box 4.1.3

Business Group

When talking to a group made up of business people, they may or may not be interested in the science behind your work, but they will definitely be interested in knowing about how it could affect the economic decisions that they make on a daily basis. You will be most successful at reaching people from the business sector if you can help them to see how your results may contribute value to their product or to allow them to decrease their costs of production, for example. Once you have their attention on the potential value of your work to their bottom line, then you can use the science to illustrate your evidence and to demonstrate the importance of your work for them to consider.

Many biologists, particularly those with conservation or environmental interests, feel that they can engage a business audience by appealing to their moralistic concerns, such as our responsibility to care for the earth. This may or may not work, because whereas most business people are capable of being concerned for the environment, they will be most interested in it if you can help them see how green marketing and energy efficiency may be money making endeavors, for example.

BOX 4.1.4

Government Agency or Ministry

The results of your work as a biologist may be of importance to policy making, specifically if it relates to hot topics in society, such as biotechnology, biological conservation or genetic engineering, for example. Many scientists, therefore, are compelled to interact with policymakers of various sorts, from parliamentary advisors to the politicians themselves.

When taking the time to talk to policymakers, we must recognize that they are on very busy schedules and have much quicker deadlines than what we are used to in academia. Often, their daily schedules are organized into 15 min blocks of time and much of the decision-making is done in walking consultations between meetings.

In contrast to journalism, which may be all about the process of discovery and the passion of the individual, policymakers are all about the 'actionables'. Help them out by providing tangible suggestions about the importance of your issue and what steps may be taken to get progress underway. Help them see the way from your big-picture conception to feet-on-the-ground actions that can be taken. Do not focus on the negative, provide positive suggestions. Focus on the issue.

Policymakers and politicians will look at the issue along the lines of the '5 Ps', being: People, Press, Policy, Principle, Politics.² That is, they will be most receptive to your message if they can see how it affects the people in their constituency, how they will be perceived (hopefully positively) in the press by acting on your issue, how it relates to current or proposed legislation, how your issue relates to 'doing the right thing' and how it will give them an edge over their political rivals, respectively.

Box 4.1.5

Town-Hall Meeting

When scientists are asked to speak at town hall meetings it is usually because there is a local issue of concern to the citizens and an expert scientist may be able to help them to understand it better. In this case, it is important to speak about your work in such a way that the citizens of this municipality can see how it affects their backyards, their children and their local standard of living. In this context, it is not important to go into the elaborate details of your study design and results, but like with any scientific presentation, the conclusions and interpretations must be supported by empirical data.

In a Town Hall meeting, you will not be able to assume knowledge of the levels of education or specialized expertise from your audience, except inasmuch as one can infer from the socio-economic status of the municipality's neighborhoods. For this reason, you should avoid using highly specialized scientific terminology or to rely too heavily on complicated scientific theories and concepts. While these audience members may not have university degrees in Science, that does not mean that they are stupid and you should not talk to them as such. They are very likely highly intelligent people with an ability to understand concepts that are explained to them reasonably. Consequently, you should find a way to explain the concepts and theories of your work and its results without using the specific terminology of your field that is relatively unknown outside of it.