

■ MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN

Take Science out of the lab

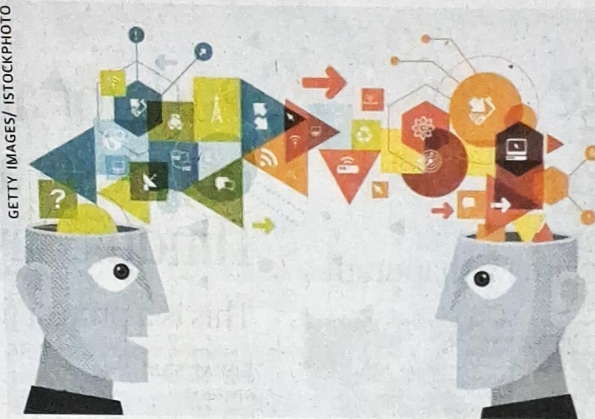
We are currently in what observers call the 'Golden Age of Science Communication'. Science communication is the practice of informing and inspiring the public with scientific knowledge. And it has come a long way from the dry lectures that were the go-to tools for sharing information about scientific research and new findings, and for myth-busting.

With new media practices evolving in recent years, science communication has taken on several exciting and innovative forms – podcasts, documentaries, social media posts, comics, newsletters, and many more. More importantly, it has become accessible. It is just a matter of nudging researchers and scientists towards thinking of ways to communicate their thoughts and expertise, and giving them a tangible incentive to do so.

The IndiaBioscience Outreach Grant (IOG) was launched in 2020, specifically to achieve this purpose – to facilitate early career scientists to get started on science communication and outreach. It intends to motivate young researchers to step out of their labs and build stronger connections with the broader public through innovative science outreach efforts.

IOG is an initiative of IndiaBioscience, an almost 15-year-old project operating within the campus of the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru. It aims to bring the whole life-science research community under one roof to promote networking, foster partnerships, and enable resource and knowledge sharing.

Shantala Hari Dass, a PhD in neuroscience, is the Execu-



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tive Director of IndiaBioscience. She is a strong advocate for communicating Science and building and supporting the scientific community.

Dass talks to *Education Plus* about the need for science outreach and how IOG helps towards that cause.

Why is science outreach important?

As the pandemic had made it abundantly clear, building scientific temper within our society is crucial for maintaining the health of our communities as well as for fighting mis-

information and superstition. Scientists play an important role in this process by encouraging narratives supported by experimentally-validated facts, as well as by using their expertise to weigh in on various important issues. However, there exists a large gap in communication between scientists and society at large, with the results of scientific research often remaining confined to elite journals and not reaching the public, including the taxpayers who have funded the research. Scientific research doesn't end with lab work or the publication of scientific papers – it is completed only when it is communicated to the larger public.

How does the public benefit from this?

Long-term: Builds scientific temperament. Short-term: Depending on the project, it brings scientific knowledge and advances to select target groups (such as school students/ undergraduate students/ and so on). This not only takes Science out of the lab but also provides additional and engaging ways to learn and discuss science. For example, one of our winning

projects from the previous years – 'Talk to a Scientist' – is a weekly online event where children get to interact with a scientist.

What can be done by public and private institutions to promote science outreach?

By encouraging/mandating science outreach and Science communication activities by researchers; Budgeting time for them to undertake such activities; Including this as a parameter for promotions, awarded grants, and so on; Instituting awards and fellowships for outstanding science communication; Creating more avenues for researchers to engage with science communicators and public engagement experts; Creating a dedicated science communication/ outreach office that facilitates researchers to undertake such activities; Dedicating a budget for such activities.

3rd IndiaBioscience Outreach Grant

Eligibility: Researchers in Life Sciences, who have set up a lab in India not more than eight years ago. (They are actively encouraged to partner with students, artists, writers, filmmakers, and other scientists, and build a team to undertake the proposed project.)

Rewards: ₹1 lakh for first-time grant winners and ₹1.5 lakh for extension grant winners

Indirect benefits:

Areas of assessment:

A panel of experts will screen the applications based on the following:

Application deadline: September 30

For more details: india-bioscience.org