

SCIENCE & SOCIETY



aspen institute

**Catalyzing community leaders,
current and future scientists, and the general public
to build a stronger scientific ecosystem, society, and world**

PROGRAM PROSPECTUS

May 2025

www.aspeninstitute.org/science

ABOUT THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

At the [Aspen Institute](#), we ignite human potential to build understanding and create new possibilities for a better world.

The Aspen Institute is a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society. Founded in 1949, the Institute drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve the most important challenges facing the United States and the world.

- We bring together thoughtful people with diverse points of view.
- We cultivate and support values-based, purpose-driven leaders in many communities.
- We turn ideas into action and impact for individuals and society.

The Aspen Institute has earned a reputation for gathering nonpartisan thought leaders, creatives, scholars, and members of the public to address some of the world's most complex problems. But the goal of these convenings is to have an impact beyond the conference room; they are designed to provoke, further, and improve actions taken in the real world.



ABOUT SCIENCE & SOCIETY

The world is more polarized than ever. Science—especially when applied to questions about the environment, medical interventions, and new technologies—has become a splinter between people and between communities.

To overcome these divides, the Aspen Institute launched the [Science & Society Program](#) in 2019 with seed support from the [Alfred P. Sloan Foundation](#) and [Johnson & Johnson](#). Housed within the [Aspen Institute Health, Medicine and Society Program](#), Science & Society serves as a laboratory to test ideas and approaches that help explain, connect, and maximize the benefits of science for public good.

The primary audiences for our work are community leaders, science communicators, current and future scientists, and the general public. We leverage the established assets, networks, and platforms of the Aspen Institute to convene and mobilize these groups to build bridges between them.

Led by a core staff of trained scientists, the program is an early responder to emerging trends and is on the pulse of critical issues at the intersection of science and society.



4 GUIDING PILLARS

The first three years of the program focused on engaging with experts, interacting with the public, and running experiments that resulted in the establishment of four intersecting programmatic pillars:

1. Global Science

How can we accelerate the global impact of science to break down borders and contribute to our collective humanity?



2. Science & Community

How can we make science relevant to people's experiences and engage with local communities meaningfully?



3. Public Trust in Science

How can we strengthen the public's understanding of the function and benefits of science in times of both peace and crisis?



4. Science Policy

How can we enhance education and dialogue to empower scientists and policymakers to collaborate effectively for informed decision-making?

5 CORE VALUES & HOW WE WORK

Our efforts are anchored in five core values of science:

Integrity

Science offers methodical pursuits to understand the natural world

Ethics

Scientists and the public share responsibility to implement science for the benefit of humanity

Hope

Scientific innovation will make the world safer, healthier, and more connected

Trust

The rigor of data and evidence leads to confidence in discovery

Engagement

An active public and collaborative scientific workforce are vital to address complex community issues

At our core, we at the Aspen Institute Science & Society Program believe that science is a guiding force for public good. To advance this mission, we work from the perspective that science is multi-faceted and science is for everyone.

Our work at the intersection of science and society enables us to be the go-to program for journalists, current and future scientists, science communicators, policymakers, and the public.

To this end, we are committed to presenting accessible and digestible information that combats misinformation while also fostering appreciation for science.



WHO WE ARE



Aaron Mertz, Ph.D., is a biophysicist and educator and has been recognized internationally for his laboratory research and advocacy for underrepresented groups in science. He joined the Aspen Institute in 2019 to found and direct the Science & Society Program after a postdoctoral fellowship in biology at the Rockefeller University and graduate studies in physics at Yale University and the history of science at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

Jylana Sheats, Ph.D., M.P.H., is an applied behavior scientist who works across sectors to improve public and health and address health disparities and outcomes. After undergraduate and graduate studies at Spelman College, Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and Indiana University, she completed a postdoctoral fellowship in behavioral medicine at Stanford School of Medicine.



Hassan Farah, Ph.D., holds a doctorate from Virginia Tech on the biomechanics of balance and walking for children with hemiplegic cerebral palsy. Hassan has developed and directed leadership training programs and organized large-scale negotiations as a student advocate. He seeks to develop innovative, science education programs that are rooted in local communities.

Sejal Goud is a senior at Princeton University, where she is pursuing studies in public policy and international affairs. She is committed to leveraging her backgrounds in advocacy and journalism to promote the link between civic engagement and science communication.



Cary Funk, Ph.D., is past director of science and society research at Pew Research Center, where she led the Center's public opinion surveys and qualitative studies to understand public views about the social, ethical and policy implications of science for society. She is a widely recognized expert on public trust in science and views on emerging developments in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and vaccines as well as issues related to climate, extreme weather, and an energy transition.

Lee McIntyre, Ph.D., is was a Research Fellow at the Center for Philosophy and History of Science at Boston University and the Executive Director of the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University. He is the bestselling author of *Post-Truth*, which was named a CNN Book-of-the-Week and a Best Book of 2018 by the PBS News Hour, along with numerous other books such as *The Scientific Attitude* (2019), *How To Talk To A Science Denier* (2021), and *On Disinformation* (2023).



ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Science & Society Program is guided by an Advisory Council comprised of experts and thought leaders who engage with science and society from myriad angles: academia, industry, education, journalism, public institutions, advocacy, finance, and the arts. Together, this group helps the program:

- **Define critical societal issues** that cause gaps in public trust in, and/or understanding of, science;
- **Delineate the obstacles** toward realizing a more engaged and creative scientific workforce;
- **Brainstorm feasible strategies** to address these challenges; and
- **Identify** potential strategic and **collaborative partners to enact change**.



Elizabeth Blackburn, Ph.D.
Co-Chair

Molecular biologist; Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine; UCSF Prof. Emerita of Biochemistry and Biophysics; former Salk Institute President



Seema Kumar
Co-Chair

Chief Executive Officer, Cure and former Johnson & Johnson Global Head, Office of Innovation, Public Health, and Scientific Engagement



Maya Ajmera

President and CEO of Society for Science & the Public and Publisher of its award-winning magazine *Science News*



Joy Buolamwini, Ph.D.

Poet of code who uses art and research to illuminate social implications of AI; Algorithmic Justice League Founder; and Forbes Top 50 Women in Tech (youngest)



Virginia Amann

ENTENTE Network CEO who champions science and society through strategic communications and impactful partnerships



Valerie Conn

Founder and Principal of Future Science Now and past President and Executive Director of Science Philanthropy Alliance

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ADVISORY COUNCIL

continued



Susan Desmond-Hellmann, M.D.
Oncologist; former Gates Foundation CEO;
and former UCSF Chancellor



Mae Jemison, M.D.
Engineer; physician;
former NASA astronaut; and
100 Year Starship (100YSS) project Principal



Lauren Gunderson
Playwright and author bringing stories
of science into the spotlight, currently
recognized as America's most
produced living playwright



Robert Klitzman, M.D.
Psychiatrist; bioethicist; and
Columbia University Professor and Director of
the Masters of Bioethics Program



Margaret (Peggy) Hamburg, M.D.
Former American Association for the
Advancement of Science (AAAS) President
and Chair of the Board; and
former FDA Commissioner



Gary Lauder
Venture capitalist and
Lauder Partners LLC Managing Director



Ana Humphrey
Regeneron Science Talent Search Winner;
Harvard University graduate; and
Boston Consulting Group Associate



Alan Lightman, Ph.D.
Physicist; writer; author of *Einstein's Dreams*; and
host of public-television series *Searching:
Our Quest for Meaning in the Age of Science*



Joe Palca, Ph.D.
Former National Public Radio (NPR)
science correspondent and
National Association of Science Writers
past president

CURRENT & PAST FUNDERS

Founding Program Support



Current Program Support



Rick Stamberger
Nick DeWolf Foundation

Current Project-Specific Support



Carson Family
Charitable Trust



Former Met Museum President
Daniel H. Weiss

Mathematician Cardiologist
Nancy Blachman Holly S. Andersen, M.D.

Past Program Support



Smart Family Foundation of New York
Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Charitable Trust
Paul Beirne Foundation

Past Project-Specific Support



Hurford Foundation
Emily Gold Mears

FUNDER TESTIMONIALS

“We’re focused on combining heart, science and ingenuity to profoundly change the trajectory of health for humanity.

Demystifying and championing the tremendous value of science to society are of paramount importance not just for our company, but also for creating a better world.”



“Johnson & Johnson is thrilled to partner with the **Aspen Institute** to **engage** the hearts and minds of people on science to **drive innovation** forward.”

– Advisory Council Co-Chair **Seema Kumar**, CEO of **Cure** and former Vice President of Innovation, Global Health, and Policy Communication at **Johnson & Johnson**

“Many of the most difficult challenges humanity now faces will require **essential contributions from science** if they are to be solved. Thus the lack of confidence in science and scientists expressed by many people, across the political spectrum, is a genuine threat to human flourishing if not our very **survival**. The Science and Society Program seeks to address this critical problem by **creatively building bridges** to span the growing divide between science and the public at large. This work has **never been more important than it is today**.”



– **Adam Falk, Ph.D.**, President at the **Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**

GLOBAL SCIENCE

In order for science to reach its fullest potential of bridging societal divides, it must respect global cooperation in both producing and applying science.

ASPEN GLOBAL CONGRESS ON SCIENTIFIC THINKING & ACTION

This conference gathered 100 thought leaders from 50+ countries implementing scientific and rational approaches to local and global policy making and education. Expert presentations, breakout sessions, and large-group discussions focused on themes transcending geographical boundaries: science denial, science popularization, vaccines, climate change, medicine, and food biotechnologies.



GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS ON SCIENCE AND MISINFORMATION

This documentary series on PBS, satellite television, and streaming features the perspectives of leading science experts from Japan, China, Philippines, India, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Germany, Italy, France, Brazil, and the United States to speak about science denial in a “post-truth” era, climate change, disinformation, propaganda, the paranormal, and natural disasters.



INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR PURE SCIENCE

Our newly available report and accompanying events on pure science, in collaboration with the 13 other countries where the Aspen Institute has international partners, assess the current state of basic science around the world, create a forum for discussion among scientific leaders, and provide guidance on how basic science can be supported and advanced internationally.



SCIENCE & COMMUNITY

Many of society's most pressing matters are scientific. Youth and community leaders around the world have been at the forefront of these issues and are spurring scientists to consider the connection between urgent global matters and the experiences of local communities.

OUR FUTURE IS SCIENCE (OFIS)

This national youth initiative exposes high-school students to science education and careers through near-peer mentorship with graduate students, a STEM curriculum including a capstone project, a guest speaker series, and a national educational campaign. In 2024, OFIS was named a Winner in the Falling Walls Foundation international competition to identify the breakthrough of the year in science engagement.



A BLUEPRINT FOR EQUITABLE AI

Following early distribution at the World Economic Forum (Davos), this publicly available report in partnership with AI lab DeepMind has garnered attention for its timely perspectives on building and distributing equitable AI. The report is the product of discussions between international, multidisciplinary experts including technologists, legal scholars, policy advocates, journalists, academics, and auditors.



GLOBAL NETWORK FOR COMMUNITY SCIENCE

With presenters from the Arctic, Australia, Botswana, the Caribbean, China, Ecuador, Israel, India, Iraq, New Zealand, and the United States, this workshop built a collaborative, international, and vibrant network of partners committed to science research and outreach through communities: conducting scientific research that is deeply embedded in local communities and that respects local expertise.



PUBLIC TRUST IN SCIENCE

To have access and to make use of science and innovation, the public must accept science over pseudoscience and misinformation.

SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE

This upcoming feature-length documentary film will immerse us in the lives of passionate scientists as they navigate environments where competition for resources is fierce, institutional barriers abound, and their focus is directed away from science to survival. Yet human health is dependent on their success and perseverance.



DISCOVER DISCOVERY CAMPAIGN

Our public campaign showcases stories of how scientists discovered discovery itself—and science more broadly. Our goal is for youth to be inspired by career possibilities and for the public to see humanizing sides of scientists, thereby garnering greater public trust in scientists' work. Scientists also learn to tell their stories beyond the discoveries they are currently making.



RECENT EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Public symposia, summits, and writings have explored concrete strategies for building trust in science, COVID-19 vaccines, space travel, personal genetics, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, climate change, and scientific uncertainty. Publications consist of digital magazines, reports, op-eds, and blog posts.



SCIENCE POLICY

Empowering boundary spanners and translators can develop a cross-sector network to bridge the gap between policymakers, their stakeholders, and the scientific community.

SCIENCE AT THE BALLOT BOX

This collaboration with *Nautilus* magazine explores key issues in science as the U.S. approached the critical 2024 federal election and beyond with deep dives into how to rebuild trust in science, how to combat climate change, local efforts in civic science, what AI can do for our country, and how to preserve America's place in global science.



FUTURE OF SCIENCE IN AMERICA: THE ELECTION ISSUE

This magazine collaboration with Leaps.org offers wide-ranging perspectives on challenges and opportunities for science as we elected our next national and local leaders in 2020.



CASE FOR AN AMERICAN SCIENCE CORPS

This *Science Magazine* editorial argues for a new national program that trains, equips, and employs scientists to engage directly with their communities in a variety of venues scientists have typically avoided: places of worship, state and county fairs, farmers' markets, town halls, local theaters, libraries, community colleges, and sporting events.





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REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

- [\(Re\)building Trust in Science: How Scientists and Communicators are Reimagining the Relationship Between Knowledge and the Public](#) (May 2025)
- [Beyond the Lab: Trust, Storytelling, and the Fight for America's Attention](#) (May 2025)
- [A Two-Way Street for Art and Science: Toward an Integrated Vision of Meaningful STEAM](#) (December 2024)
- [Science at the Ballot Box](#) (November 2024)
- [Tactics for Trust: A Practitioner's Playbook for Building Public Trust in Science and Other Domains](#) (July 2024)
- [Unlocking a Stronger Open Access Ecosystem](#) (December 2023)
- [Building Bridges, Earning Trust: The WHY and the HOW of Public Trust in Science](#) (December 2023)
- [Advancing LGBTQ+ People in STEM Careers](#) (June 2023)
- [Clinical Trial Diversity: Advancing Scientific Discovery and Equity](#) (March 2023)
- [Building and Distributing Artificial Intelligence for Equitable Outcomes: A Blueprint for Equitable AI](#) (February 2023)
- [In Favor of Pure Science](#) (September 2022)
- [One Health / One Planet: A Special Magazine on Climate Change and Infectious Diseases](#) (May 2022)
- [The Attack of Zombie Science](#) (January 2022)
- [Building a Global Network for Community Science](#) (October 2021)
- [Aspen Global Congress on Scientific Thinking & Action](#) (July 2021)
- [Science's new frontier – The Case for an American Science Corps](#) (March 2021)
- [The Future of Science in America: The Election Issue](#) (October 2020)
- [The Pandemic Issue](#) (June 2020)



GET INVOLVED

As a part of the 501(c)(3) non-profit Aspen Institute, **Science & Society** is made possible by generous grants and donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

If you or your organization would be interested in partnering with the **Aspen Institute Science & Society Program** and furthering our work at this critical juncture, please find our contact information on the next page. For updates on our latest projects and invitations to our public events, we invite you to join the Aspen Institute Science & Society Program mailing list below. Please also consider making a tax-deductible donation to support our work.

**Join Our
Mailing List**

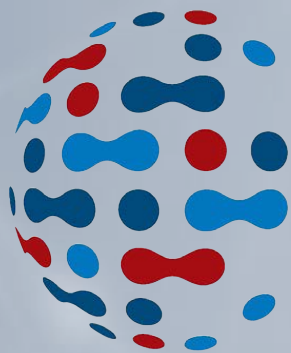
**Make Charitable
Donation**

“While the Aspen Institute has long recognized the **important role of science in society, the time is right for a more focused effort.**”

“With science under fire from various sectors of our society, the work of this new program will be all the more **timely and impactful.**”

– **Elliot Gerson**, *Executive Vice President for Policy, Public, and International Programs at the **Aspen Institute***





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