

PLOS Science Wednesday: Hi reddit, we're Kristen, Stephanie and Valorie. We organized the March for Science events in DC and San Francisco. We're taking your questions on what's coming next – Ask Us Anything!

PLOSScienceWednesday¹ and r/Science AMAs¹

¹Affiliation not available

April 17, 2023

Abstract

Update: We just learned Kristen, MFSSF lead organizer, will not be joining this AMA. Stephanie will be representing MFSSF in this forum. Hi Reddit, My name is Valorie Aquino, and I am a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of New Mexico. My research reconstructs and compares original, high-resolution archaeological and paleoclimatological records to better understand the articulation of climate volatility and politics in the ancient Maya world. I am an organizer with the March for Science DC, where my role is Co-chair. My name is Stephanie Fine Sasse and I am Co-Founder & Creative Director at The People's Science. My work focuses on improving the relationship between science, society, and the individual through educational technology, informal learning, and interactive STEAM experiences. I am also an organizer with the March for Science SF, where my role is Chair of the Partners & Programming committees. I also supported the national team in their Week of Action and initial post-March development. With over 600 satellite marches worldwide, there's no doubt that March for Science was an incredible moment. Now the question on everyone's mind is how we can turn that moment into a movement. That's no easy feat, but I can't tell you how excited I am that we have this chance to try. You can follow us on Twitter: Stephanie @thescientish. March for Science SF @sciencemarchSF March for Science DC @sciencemarchDC

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PLOSSCIENCEWEDNESDAY [R/SCIENCE](#)

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You can follow us on Twitter:

Stephanie [@thescientish](#).

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Wednesday: Hi reddit, we're

I know a lot of scientists who avoided this event, as they saw it as something far more political than career-needs-driven (as if all the plumbers or contractors or coal miners had marched, for instance). How do you avoid that going forward? How do you win hearts and minds from the vast middle of the nation (moderates), and how do you bring more than a token number of conservatives into the movement?

[thatguydr](#)

Valorie (DC): I think what we witnessed on April 22 was hundreds of thousands of people around the world demonstrating their desire to have science and scientists play a more active role in improving and strengthening the role of science in society and policy. Many of the marchers are science enthusiasts and advocates, and marching together with people embedded in science communities displayed a commitment to working together to champion and improve how science serves all our

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communities. We heard the message loud and clear -- people want to see more scientists out there, and more scientists felt empowered to do that!

Emphasizing the role that science plays to undergird our economies, to prolong and save lives, to ensure we have clean air and safe food and water, to bolster national defense -- that is nonpartisan no matter which way people cut it. Speaking to people's values -- what matters in day to day lives -- is crucial. The MFS movement is aspirational, not negative. After all, the brand of science is HOPE, and science enables us with the best tools to reduce inherent human biases, to address our modern problems, and to help us build the better futures we envision. We must keep working hard from local to global to not only relay this message, but to demonstrate it.

I guess I'll start. So, what comes next?

[SirT6](#)

Valorie (DC): The global March for Science movement kicked off with more than 600 marches around the world in celebration and defense of science in society and policy. But those marches were just the beginning! Now, the real work begins. On Sunday, we rebooted our website to highlight a Week of Action that keeps building on the momentum from April 22 into sustained, coordinated science advocacy impacts: <http://marchforscience.com/>. We must #keepmarching to channel the energy and momentum from the march into a series of focused and connected actions demonstrating our support for science and science-based policy, and to communicate how science serves or can better serve our communities.

In addition to the daily messages, impact actions, and education links, threading through the whole week is a postcard initiative, where we urge participants to send an e-postcard expressing support for science/March for Science/free inquiry/critical thinking/local issues. It kicked off yesterday <http://p2a.co/3BfL3J9> with a letter to the President of the UN General Assembly and continues going from global to local representatives!

Many conservatives are scientists or support science. Many even believe in climate change! What are you going to do to encourage those people to come out for future marches with signs that identify them, to try to "normalize" support for science on the right and further pressure Republican politicians to weigh science more heavily in their decisions?

[LudovicoSpecs](#)

Steph: In many ways, this is *the* question. How do we make sure science is not branded as "belonging" to any given party so that it can be celebrated and utilized equally by all? I think it's a complex question with many possible answers, some of which March for Science can address directly and others that require a broader societal shift. I've heard many stories of conservative scientists feeling isolated by their peers, for example, so inclusivity has to start from within the culture of science itself. That's the long game.

Speaking specifically from SF's perspective in the short-term, we have plans to produce stories that focus on a given socioscientific issue that's often presented as a partisan issue. We're currently developing a program that partners with groups that typically see the issue differently, telling the stories and backgrounds of both sides, and facilitating dialogue. We also hope to shed light on the stories of those who break the stereotype of the "typical" scientist, whether religiously, politically or otherwise. Our hope is that by respecting, featuring, and encouraging informed dialogue across perspectives or profiles, we can take one step closer to breaking down some of these perceived barriers. This won't play out the same way everywhere, so it's important that individual Satellites tailor their initiatives to

their local communities.

Of course, no single program is going to fix these problems, but my hope is that this movement will have inspired enough efforts that, if coordinated, we're able to move in a better direction.

Hi!

With so much engagement in cities around the world, how do you plan on keeping those people engaged and active with the movement? As I understand many satellite marches were more or less independently organized and have their own organizational structure, with their own goals.

Are you interested in collaborating with these groups going forward, and if so, how do you plan to do so? How does the March for Science avoid the fate of the Occupy Wall Street movement?

[superhelical](#)

Valorie (DC): Thanks for your questions! April 22 was just the start. Now we #keepmarching for sustained, coordinated science advocacy! One of the first steps toward that is our Week of Action: <https://satellites.marchforscience.com/>, where we highlight daily themes, impacts, educational and advocacy components for participants to engage in and share! We will continue working on co-developed and original initiatives in the future, in collaboration with partnering organizations and the thousands of satellite organizers and marchers around the world. Throughout the past few months, we have been communicating with and listening to these groups, via email, phone, social media, and other platforms. Our mission and identity stays the same -- championing nonpartisan science for the common good.

The success of any grassroots campaign like this one, and the OWS movement, can be measured in several ways. I don't think previous movements 'failed' so much as there are short- and long-term scales and goals at which to gauge success. The turnouts on April 22 with over 600 locations around the globe participating in solidarity to champion science and its role in society was a success. Moving forward, it will take more time to see how those efforts lead to concrete changes. But already, we are seeing so much local engagement happening with people initiating their own science clubs at schools, pledging to become more consistent voters, starting or joining science meet-ups and get-togethers (such as participating in the taste of science festival or Get Out the Science), hosting science teach-ins, and more. Truly, it is incredible.

Who is Kristen?

Did you come across any challenges/experience a big learning curve as people trained in science trying to do something that is really about event management, PR, and communications? Is there anything you plan to do differently moving forward to make sure your [goals are focused](#) and that your actual messaging ([twitter etc](#)) supports your public stance that "science is political but not partisan"?

[p1percub](#)

Sara K, PLOS official: Kristen was the MFS SF organizer. She had to pull out of the AMA due to a schedule conflict with her day job. Stephanie of the MFS SF team was already attending the AMA and will be representing MFS SF on Kristen's behalf.

Who is Kristen?

Did you come across any challenges/experience a big learning curve as people trained in science

trying to do something that is really about event management, PR, and communications? Is there anything you plan to do differently moving forward to make sure your [goals are focused](#) and that your actual messaging ([twitter etc](#)) supports your public stance that "science is political but not partisan"?

[p1percub](#)

Steph: Speaking from SF perspective specifically here. Yes, absolutely. I don't think I've ever learned so much about myself in such a short period of time. Every day was a new challenge. As a grassroots movement, we were defining our goals, defining our roles, developing partnerships, fundraising, and juggling tasks that I'd never heard of three months ago... all while trying to figure out how best to work with a team of people we'd never met before. We were pulled together and forward simply by our commitment to speak up for equitable evidence-based policy.

Now that we have space to breathe and reflect, our next steps in SF are to identify what went well, what gaps there were in our knowledge and skills, and what structure/programs we need to move forward, including strategies for effectively communicating our core goals and messages. It was definitely a crash course in a lot of things that were never on my to-learn list, but I'm very excited to channel those lessons into long-term impact.

Do you think that the Marches for Science could have a negative effect in making science seem like just a liberal agenda? I am proud to be a scientist and believe in my field, but I worry about non-scientists coming to see "science" as just a mask over a progressive agenda, instead of an objective search for the truth. If that truth ends up supporting my (liberal) moral and political beliefs great, but as the field becomes more and more openly liberal, there's a problem both in the credibility of science that takes certain political beliefs as facts and in the perception of the credibility of science if people believe scientists are using their beliefs to shape their work instead of the other way around.

I wanted to support the March for Science, but it seemed to become more anti-Trump than pro-science, so I stayed away for the reasons above. Do you think the Marches for Science have off a partisan perception, or did they remain more objective in promoting widely accepted science?

[bofstein](#)

Valorie (DC): The MFS global movement demonstrated that science has no borders; the urgency and the desire to express solidarity in championing and improving the role of science in society went beyond the US borders. Of course, specific issues at each place and country were clear as well, and we can't deny the current sociopolitical climate in the US, and how that affects geopolitics. At the same time, we are strongly committed to being and remaining nonpartisan. After all, that's one of the core issues we marched for -- to keep partisan politics out of science. Acknowledging and voicing support and actively engaging to ensure that science continues to be a strong priority in our lives and societies absolutely delves into the political -- but does not and should not be partisan. That science helps us prolong and save lives, enables us to monitor for air and water and food quality, for improving national security, for giving us tools to build a better future -- those are not and should not be partisan, despite how much other people may want to paint them in that light. Science improves and can better improve all our lives, and all our communities.

I understand your hesitancy in joining one of the Marches, but I urge you to reconsider involvement. The only way to be heard is to speak up. Have your voice join the voices around the world that proclaim: we champion science that serves the common good!

It seemed that a lot of satellite marches kind of did their own thing and some had little to no engagement with DC. How are you bringing them into a larger unified network? And how are you

involving satellite marches in your decisions about how to move forward and make this a long-lasting movement? Whose vision of the march and what it could be as a movement is being used to determine your goals?

[firedrops](#)

Valorie (DC): Hi Firedrops, thanks for being a Boston organizer! Having urged my colleagues to organize the local Albuquerque one, I know how much work that entailed -- so thank you! Steph (SF) fielded a lot of your q here already. As she mentioned, we have been working to gather and synthesize feedback from all organizers, including global representatives, as well as from the hundreds of partnering organizations. What is clear is that many are remaining committed stakeholders, who want to keep working together to have a unified and coordinated science outreach and advocacy platform together. April 22 was just the beginning; now, the movement continues!

It seemed that a lot of satellite marches kind of did their own thing and some had little to no engagement with DC. How are you bringing them into a larger unified network? And how are you involving satellite marches in your decisions about how to move forward and make this a long-lasting movement? Whose vision of the march and what it could be as a movement is being used to determine your goals?

[firedrops](#)

Steph: Great question. Satellites were an incredible resource to one another throughout the planning process. There was a lot of resource sharing and collaborative problem solving that I think set the tone for what needs to happen next. If the goal is to build a unified network moving forward, it has to start with maintaining the lines of communication between Satellites and building effective bidirectional lines of communication between Satellites and national.

The beginnings of this is in the works. A couple of weeks ago, Satellites were sent an overview of possible future plans and invited to provide feedback, both about what they think the organization should become and what role they think the Satellites should play within it. The next step is synthesizing and folding in that feedback as a post-March organizational structure is finalized. Our goal in soliciting feedback from as many groups as possible is to champion a collective vision that strikes the balance between supporting Satellites to make the decisions that best fit their local community and providing sufficient infrastructure for this to become a sustainable organization.

On a personal note, I believe that it's the incredible network of Satellites that gives this movement a chance to have a serious impact - so a critical part of this process is taking the time to hear what they need to move forward.

The march was terrific! Will it be annual? If so, I'd love to see the "science fair" section at the end of the march expanded and more school groups represented.

[LudovicoSpecs](#)

Valorie (DC): Thank you so much! It was a joy to see the crowd in DC from the mainstage, despite the rain, and to see all the supporters and marchers on the street after the rally! We are definitely discussing this being an annual event and will know more after discussion with satellite organizers and partnering organizations. In the meantime, please continue to encourage engagement on our Week of Action: <http://p2a.co/3BfL3J9>, which features highlighted daily impact actions, a postcard initiative running all week for people to send support statements to representatives from global to local levels, and supplementary actions co-developed or originated by our partner organizations! NCSE also has a science teach-in toolkit publicly available as a helpful starting resource to hold informal science teach-

ins anywhere any time!

Thanks for doing this AMA!

My question is directed at Stephanie in regards to her work with The People's Science. I'm part of a student organization at my university that has tried several times to get science outreach programs started in the local community. Unfortunately none of our efforts have really been all that successful and I think it's predominantly because of poor long-term planning. The logistics of trying to organize regular visits to local classrooms make the entire process unbearable for most graduate students.

Do organizations like yours provide resources for scientists and academics to help navigate the difficulties in doing science outreach? Do you have any recommended reading on the matter? Thanks!

[shiruken](#)

Steph: Absolutely - I get it. When I was in graduate school, I started an outreach program in our lab. We organized field trips for students to learn from my PI, tour the MRI, and get some selfies with real brains (which once led to me having to answer an 8 year old's question: "Was this in someone's head once? Are they OK? O_O).

It was a huge challenge and it's a problem that there is not well developed infrastructure to support these sorts of programs more broadly. Scientists need to do their part, but we also need to support liaisons who know how to run these sorts of programs. There are currently very few jobs for the "in-betweeners" as my old lab called me.

The People's Science does have a science communication/training wing. We recently went to UC Davis, for example, where we spoke to a wonderful group of scientists called "Science Says" about these sorts of issues and best practices.

I think training is helpful, but institutional support is just as important. Many researchers I've worked with over the years feel that doing outreach work is at least somewhat at odds with their career plans; that the culture of science isn't currently conducive to prioritizing these efforts. We have to find a way to change that. I think that March for Science has a great opportunity here to scale and implement support programs in Satellite locations. My hope is that your local Satellite would have a program in place or work with a local partner organization that had such a program so that the role of the scientists is to show up, talk, listen, and do their part... rather than playing the part of the organizer. Then, educational organizations like The People's Science and ComSciCon and League of Extraordinary Scientists can all contribute to providing resources to fill in the educational gaps for such programs. It's going to have to be a team effort.

For resources and a selection of research articles on science communication and outreach more broadly, check out our ongoing list: www.shareyourscience.org.

Hi Valorie & Stephanie (+Kristen?) thanks for doing the AMA!

I have been wondering for a while now, how does such an expansive and multi-disciplined movement such as March for Science get organized- even within the state sectors such as 'DC & SF' for you guys?

Surely there is far too much work for just a couple of organizers to do in reality, so how is the selection done when it comes to public statements and AMA's such as this one?

All the best,

Kal.

[HerbziKal](#)

Valorie (DC): Thanks for participating in the AMA, Kal, and great q! This was, by far, the most challenging and inspiring thing, I've ever done. What started as a few independent conversations in social media platforms in January quickly grew into a global movement with hundreds of thousands of active supporters! Much of the organizing involved working together with lots of people across time zones, almost all of us total strangers with varying backgrounds and skillsets and day jobs and personal obligations to boot! It was a truly extraordinary feat to coordinate, and I tip my hat to everyone involved and all the people who organized/continue to organize grassroots campaigns! Now we are working in conjunction (partnering organization representatives, satellite organizers, and the feedback from marchers) to maintain and grow the global network and infrastructure to keep championing science for the common good.

Selection on public statements and AMAs vary, depending on availability (as we have all been passion project volunteers!), relevancy (role in organization), and other factors. It has surely been a gargantuan and galvanizing experience being involved in this.

Except for the sciences should there be marches for other areas of culture? March and art for example?

I'm convinced if everyone listened to some Chopin whilst looking at Starry Night, everyone would be a better person.

In addition to this, wtf do we need to do to get more women in science and engineering? As an engineer who recently advertised a role, all responses were from men!

I once had a conversation with a 7 year old girl who said "engineering is for boys" This is an issue!

[StarWarsStarTrek](#)

Steph: Absolutely. First of all, I often say that art and science are being kept apart against their will. This is reinforced by common neuromyths like "Left Brain/Right Brain" suggesting that creativity/art and logic/science are somehow independent. Aside from this being completely false from an evidence-perspective, the popularity of this idea speaks to how our culture categorizes different ways of knowing - which is a problem. This is where the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, *Art*, and Mathematics) movement is trying to make a difference. In my experience with March for Science, STEAM has been an important emphasis. We had science illustrators, art installations, musicians, filmmakers, etc. at the SF March. Essentially, artists showing up for science. Though it may be idealistic, I think we should be shooting for a world where scientists feel compelled to show up for a March for Art as well, and I think incorporating STEAM into our messaging is a good starting point. P.s. today happens to be "Science Creates" Day in our Week of Action! Check it out:

www.marchforscience.com

As to your second point about the impact of stereotype threat on children's interest in STEM, I think there are a lot of moving parts. First of all, we have to change the messaging and break the stereotypes. Unfortunately, a lot of this comes from pop culture. We have to make sure the people we cast and the characters that children see representing scientists are diverse and representative of the full population. Additionally, there is a lot of research suggesting that women and underrepresented minorities tend to show early interest in science but then drop off. To me, this says we have work to do to ensure that science as an institution is welcoming and listening to people of all backgrounds who may currently feel excluded, unheard, or unsupported. Science, as an institution, reflects the biases of society, so we have to be intentional about doing better. Everyone benefits from a rich pool of diverse

scientists at the wheel.

Most of that is my personal take, but I will say I feel like the March for Science takes these ideas seriously. In SF we worked extremely hard to be proactive about the voices and partners we shared our platform with and how we were using our influence. A common misconception is that these are peripheral - even "distracting" - issues, but they're not. They're core to making science something that truly is for everyone. And, perhaps indirectly, that's really the goal. That's how we get everyone to support science: we work towards a science that is serving everyone. These issues can't be solved passively, and I'm very proud of the choices SF made to support evidence-based policy, equity, and STEAM, with each building up rather than detracting from the other.

What was the final tally for participants in the DC event? What other cities had large turnouts?

[shiruken](#)

Valorie (DC): DC had tens of thousands attend, as many as 100k+ (although this was reported informally by production staff and not independently verified). I can solidly state it was more than the 10k reported in various media outlets :) Many satellite marches are still reporting crowd estimates, and we look forward to providing an overall # when we receive the data!

SF, LA, NYC, Chicago, Seattle had large turnouts as well! Equally amazing were the smaller but important turnouts in the middle of the country, abroad, and even under water (Wake Atoll divers!)