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## Science Diplomacy Ally Talks

*A means for fostering exchange and building connections between science diplomacy communities*

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### DESCRIPTION

#### Introduction

Science diplomacy is grounded in dialogue, networks and exchange of ideas. Science Diplomacy Ally Talks is a structure that pairs professionals or students new to science diplomacy with a more experienced or differently focused member of the science diplomacy community. In a closed meeting online or in person, the invited 'Ally' engages with a small group to mutually exchange experiences, thoughts and questions about science diplomacy and beyond. The discussion might cover anything from career advice and common professional interests to the role of science diplomacy in a particular profession or a specific geography.

#### Objectives

The encounter is intended to be a stimulating experience for both sides of participants (the 'Allies' and the 'group') and to connect people who may otherwise not have the opportunity to interact. Objective may include to:

- Foster exchange across different generations of science diplomacy practitioners or academics
- Enable connections to form between differently focused members of the science diplomacy community
- Allow junior participants to receive career advice, gain insight into a specific profession related to science diplomacy, and build their network
- Expose participants to the views and experiences of a variety of professionals who are involved in science diplomacy in different ways and across different geographies (if conducted as a series).



### Structure and Implementation

The Talks are closed meetings hosted online or in person between one invited science diplomacy 'Ally' and a group of around 5-6 participants. The small-group format is conducive to a casual and dynamic conversation, in contrast to settings such as webinars that may be limited to question-answer exchanges. A 60-minute meeting suits an online format well, while an in-person meeting could benefit from being longer.

A few suggestions on suitable contexts in which to implement Science Diplomacy Ally Talks is provided below.

- As a supplement to a training program, especially if hosted online
- As a networking activity in a conference
- As an extracurricular opportunity in a science diplomacy university course
- As a seminar series at an institution looking to build awareness of science diplomacy among its staff.

When implementing Ally Talks, it is important to manage the expectations of both the Allies and the participating Group. The Ally should have an idea of the academic and/or professional backgrounds of the Group and should be informed about how the segment is presented to those participants. The Ally should provide a short text, such as a bio or discussion prompt, that conveys the topics on which they wish to center the discussion.

Ahead of the meeting, the Group should be provided with information about the Ally (e.g. brief bio or discussion prompt) to ensure they are prepared to relevantly contribute to the conversation. It should be clear that the meeting is interactive and that the Group members are expected to play an active role in advancing the conversation.



## PILOT EXPERIENCE

The Warsaw Science Diplomacy School (WSDS) was an intensive one-week training program hosted online by the InsSciDE project in June 2020 and 2021. It was packed with analytical discussions of science diplomacy case studies, interdisciplinary teamwork, and practitioners' insights on the meaning, applications and even risks in science diplomacy. As a bonus in the months following the completion of the program, the alumni of WSDS in 2021 had the opportunity to engage directly with a more experienced or differently focused member of the science diplomacy community external to the school, in what was called "Science Diplomacy Ally Talks".

### Method

The alumni received a program with the meeting times and descriptive texts of ten Science Diplomacy Ally Talks. They were invited to sign up to attend those that were most interesting and relevant to them. Over three months, the Talks were hosted through Zoom for one hour.

### Results

The overall reception of the Talks was positive and the alumni who joined once were the most likely attendees in subsequent Talks. However, in some sessions there was a high rate of no-shows despite several alumni having signed up, perhaps due to many being accustomed to the non-commitment of registering for webinars. There was also a lot of fluctuation in how dynamic different sessions were. Most of the Talks were lively and far-reaching, with Group members and the Ally often exchanging emails at the end. However, if there was lack of engagement from the Group, then the Talks quickly became more like a lecture from the Ally.

To enhance the outcomes of the Talks, the organizers found it crucial to emphasize to all participants that the meeting is interactive and to urge the Group to carefully review the bio or discussion prompt before the meeting. Additionally, they provided suggestions such as to start the meeting with a quick roundtable and to mention why they chose to join that Talk. It was also important to highlight to the alumni that their participation was positively expected if they signed up for a session and did not cancel, which diminished no-show incidents.



### Examples of the Science Diplomacy Allies of WSDS21

The Allies who volunteered to participate were from diverse backgrounds and at different stages in their careers, and included a few alumni from the previous edition of WSDS. To preface the meeting to the Group, some Allies chose to submit a discussion prompt and others a short bio. A few representative examples are included below.

- *Jean-Christophe Mauduit - Lecturer in Science Diplomacy at University College London*  
An astrophysicist by training, Jean-Christophe contributed to ESA and NASA satellite missions. He was previously a Research Scholar at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, DC, and Associate Director at the Science Diplomacy Center at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University, Boston). His research interests include science attaché networks, science diplomacy strategy, international scientific organizations and astronomy/space diplomacy. Come talk and reflect with Jean-Christophe about how these networks are built and what they bring.
- *Kleinsy Bonilla - Visiting Scholar at the University of Campinas UNICAMP (Brazil) (WSDS20 Alumna)*  
Topic - Engaging science diasporas for development: SD Perspective and the role of highly educated human resources from the Global South.  
I was born and raised in Guatemala. After I completed my undergraduate studies in Social Sciences I moved to different countries, spending nearly a decade in South Korea (including obtaining a master's and Ph.D., and working), 3 years in Chile and 4 years in Brazil. I wonder, can we remain relevant to our countries of origin while residing abroad? Different factors have motivated a significant number of highly educated human resources from the Global South to be trained/educated/employed in higher education or research institutions of scientifically advanced countries. In the past, the dominant concern with this type of mobility was the “brain-drain” phenomena, with fewer discussions about “brain-circulation” or “brain-gain”. In the proposed conversation, I would like to hear the viewpoints of the WSDS community on how SD might enhance possibilities to engage science diasporas for development by bridging countries of origin and host countries. Let's talk about policies, experiences, challenges and opportunities relevant to our times in which travel and communication might ease the engagement of



the scientific workforce with origins in scientifically lagging countries to close global science gaps.

- *Ernesto Fernandez-Polcuch - The Representative of UNESCO in Peru*

Ernesto is a specialist in scientific diplomacy and science, technology and innovation policy. He has a Master of Science, Technology and Society from the National University of Quilmes, Argentina. Previously, he was Head of the Section for Science Policy and Partnerships at UNESCO in Paris, and held positions in the UNESCO Regional Office of Sciences for Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Montevideo, the Office of UNESCO in Windhoek, and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in Montreal. Before joining UNESCO, he was Technical Secretary of RICYT, the Ibero-American Network of Science and Technology Indicators, a teacher, researcher and consultant in several Latin American and Caribbean countries. He is happy to discuss career paths at the interface of science, politics and diplomacy; UNESCO's role in science diplomacy; fostering international science or science policy partnerships through IGOs; and Global North/South collaboration, specifically involving Latin America.

- *Katalin Alföldi - Policy Officer, COST Association*

At the COST Association, Katalin leads the Global Networking and Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation tasks, which focus on openness and inclusiveness and promotes it as a unique platform for trusted R&I cooperation. Katalin started her career as member of the team conducting the screening negotiations on the Acquis Communautaire concerning environment and nature conservation between Hungary and the European Commission. She later became a Programme Committee member for subsequent Framework Programmes. Moving from Budapest to Brussels, Katalin took on assignments at the European Commission DG R&I dealing with the synergies between research and regional policies and designing the international STI cooperation strategy. Katalin successfully negotiated different council conclusions and the European Institute of Technology's seat agreement for Budapest, while she was science counsellor at the Hungarian Permanent Representation to the EU. Katalin has a Master of International Relations and Economics. Science and diplomacy have been interwoven in her career, through her engagement and facilitation of the advancement of science through diplomatic means. She considers networking an indispensable tool for successful science diplomacy and served as an 'expert' at WSDS20.

