



## **THE COPUS HUB TOOLKIT: A simple guide for starting your own COPUS Hub**

### **WHAT IS COPUS?**

The **Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS)** is a grassroots network formed in response to concerns about an apparent decline in the public understanding of and engagement in science. Composed of universities, scientific societies, science centers and museums, government agencies, advocacy groups, media, schools, educators, businesses, and industry, COPUS recognizes the need for commitment from all science stakeholders to work together to address this concern. Real change can occur if we, as the scientific community, share, teach, and communicate the science that we are so passionately committed to and demystify the process and nature of science so that the public has the opportunity to engage along with us in the joy of our discoveries.

COPUS facilitates relationships at the national and local levels to support this change. COPUS is building a communication network that allows organizations to share best practices, form new partnerships, and coordinate their efforts in increasing the public understanding of and engagement in science. Much of the current focus of this network is in preparation for the **Year of Science 2009 (YoS09)**. The goal of this national, year-long celebration of science is to engage the public and improve public understanding about the nature and process of science.

<http://copusproject.org/leadership.php>

The long term success of COPUS lies in two factors: (1) its ability to connect the science research and science education communities (both formal and informal) with other stakeholders with whom they can interact in order to more effectively communicate science and (2) on its ability to sustain efforts beyond the 2009 Year of Science. The newly developed COPUS regional and thematic hubs provide not only the local connections relevant to a particular regional audience or to a group sharing common interests, but they also provide the potential for a higher level of sustainability for the COPUS effort.

### **WHAT IS A COPUS HUB?**

While COPUS has been growing as a national initiative, energetic hubs of activity have begun to coalesce around common regional or professional interests and expertise. These groups provide a natural and sustainable set of associations that can interact with one another and participate effectively in the national COPUS network.

**COPUS regional hubs** are locally-based communities of COPUS participants and science stakeholders that work together within a designated geographic region to promote the public understanding of science. An up-to-date map of regional hub locations is available online:

[http://copusproject.org/regional\\_hubs.php](http://copusproject.org/regional_hubs.php)

**COPUS thematic hubs** represent nationally distributed peer communities that are interested in building bridges between their members, COPUS national, and the regional hubs to increase the public understanding of and engagement in science. These hubs cross geographic boundaries and enlist their membership to focus on their areas of expertise to support COPUS national and activities at the regional level. An up-to-date list of thematic hubs participating in COPUS is available online: [http://copusproject.org/thematic\\_hubs.php](http://copusproject.org/thematic_hubs.php)

### **Hub Structure and Operations**

COPUS Hubs remain independent, with self-determined membership, structure, focus, and activities. Whether regional or thematic, registered COPUS Hubs share certain common goals:

- To develop a shared appreciation of science and its contributions to the quality of life
- To inform and engage the public in and about science, its process and nature
- To make science more accessible to everyone

Each hub selects a representative to interact with COPUS Central in order to share ideas, resources, and best practices and to facilitate local participation in national initiatives. COPUS Hubs interact with the national Coalition by encouraging their members to register with COPUS and by sharing national resources and services with its members. In support of these efforts, COPUS Central provides an online communication tool (COPUS Commons) for its hub liaisons.

### **WHAT DOES A COPUS HUB DO?**

Each hub determines its own action plan, but has certain responsibilities to support the COPUS network and has mutually beneficial interactions with the national Coalition.

### **Hub Responsibilities**

Each COPUS Hub is expected to:

- Identify and recruit participants in the hub and facilitate networking among its members in support of the public understanding of science
- Encourage/facilitate its participants to develop collaborative activities that promote the public understanding of and engagement in science with a current focus toward participation in the Year of Science 2009 (YoS09)
- Encourage their organizational members to register with COPUS
- Coordinate promotion, national registration, and branding of YoS09 activities of the hub membership
- Identify a hub representative to interact with COPUS Central in order to take advantage of national resources and services and to share ideas, resources, and best practices

### **Interactions with COPUS Central: services and resources**

Nationally, COPUS is networking scientists, business leaders, and educators to share ideas, leverage resources, and learn from each other. COPUS is able to provide resources and services to participating hubs and organizations. COPUS Central can:

- Highlight science programs and activities of participants on the COPUS website and in the monthly newsletter, the COPUS Clarion
- Provide access to others through the COPUS program and resource directory
- Provide access to marketing resources

- Facilitate communication among all COPUS Hubs and COPUS Central through COPUS Commons – an online communication tool that supports file-sharing, tracks project achievements, highlights milestones, encourages threaded conversations, and archives document development
- Assist regional hubs in developing their own online communication tools to interact with COPUS Commons
- Assist regional hubs in developing their own websites
- Connect regional hubs with local representatives of national organizations and thematic hubs
- Guide hubs in identifying and implementing activities, programs, and resources for the Year of Science 2009

### **WHY START A COPUS HUB?**

COPUS provides new opportunities to communicate and collaborate on national and local levels. Through participation in COPUS, organizations may:

- Increase audience participation and improve visibility of science programs and resources nationally via the COPUS program and resource directory
- Enhance partnership opportunities by forming a communication network among peers with common passions, issues, and concerns
- Leverage existing resources by sharing best practices, tools, and content for improving public engagement in science
- Combine limited resources to expand efforts to new audiences
- Facilitate local awareness of and participation in national initiatives

Developing a COPUS Hub provides the opportunity to create a regional “community for science” and to build bridges between professional organizations and regional science communities. Members of a science community work together to elevate the profile of locally based resources and provide easily accessible and coordinated communication among scientists, science communicators and educators, the media, and community groups and institutions.

### **HOW DO YOU START A COPUS HUB?**

Though each COPUS Regional Hub remains unique in character, purpose, structure, and function, there are important recommendations to consider for developing a successful and sustainable COPUS Regional Hub. These include:

**1. Build on what is already there** – That means identifying the stakeholders and who is doing what. There are some obvious starting points: local museums and science centers, universities, and government agencies, but be willing to look beyond the obvious.

- A quick Internet search “Science in (name of city or region) may give you some unexpected results.
- Connect with your local public broadcasting stations.
- Consider connecting with science reporters associated with local media, park systems, local libraries, state and local science teachers associations, state academies of science, the state science supervisor, Sigma Xi chapter, university and college student groups.

**2. Maintain the grassroots character** – Start with a face-to-face meeting of a core group of interested parties and grow naturally. Within that core group:

- Discuss how to coordinate and support current activities and resources in order to engage your local audiences in the Year of Science 2009.
- Distribute responsibilities among the core members according to interest and expertise. This shares the load and creates a sense of collaboration while the hub is evolving in character and structure.
- Invite others to join in the effort.

**3. Find a champion or two** – Even with distributed responsibilities, you will need a hub facilitator or coordinator. Initially, this can be a shared task, fulfilled by donated staff time or volunteers. Eventually, you may want to consider support for a part-time or full-time position.

**4. Create a clear sense of purpose** – Begin by focusing on preparing for the Year of Science 2009. Efforts and activities should reflect local interests and needs, targeted audiences, and the participating organizations.

- Set reasonable goals and objectives, e.g. offer one public event each month; start a science café; develop a coordinated activity calendar
- Articulate expectations of and benefits to the partnering organizations. The value gained through a coordinated effort should be greater than the investment of individuals.

**5. Establish communication and marketing tools** – Email and face-to-face meetings can get you started. In addition, consider these tips:

- Develop an online discussion space for your regional hub. COPUS Central will assist with this effort.
- Create a regional hub website to serve as gateway to hub activities. COPUS Central can provide some recommendations for getting started.
- Encourage all participants to use the Year of Science 2009 branding on events and activities
- Take advantage of the marketing expertise of your local museums and informal science centers for naming and publicizing your activities and events
- Develop and implement ways to measure impact and promote your success. COPUS Central will provide an evaluation instrument for your modification and use.

**6. Develop appropriate funding strategies** – By leveraging existing resources, hub expenses should be minimal. Identify and approach local stakeholders (business, industry, foundations, and individuals) that may want to support your efforts.

**7. Stay connected with COPUS Central** – Identify a Hub liaison to interact directly with the national effort; take advantage of COPUS resources; and participate in national activities that will be highlighted each month on the Year of Science 2009 website.

- Register all participants on the COPUS website in order to access additional marketing tools and strategies
- Register all Year of Science 2009 activities on the national calendar which can then be downloaded to your hub calendar

## **THEN WHAT?**

**Registering your hub with COPUS** – Contact the COPUS Network Project Manager, Sheri Potter, [spotter@copusproject.org](mailto:spotter@copusproject.org) to register your hub and have it listed on the COPUS website.

**Expanding your hub** – As your presence grows, hub members will identify others within the community who may be interested in joining you. The expansion of your hub is determined by you, but we encourage you to be inclusive of all stakeholders who share the COPUS mission of engaging the public with science and increasing their understanding of the nature and process of science. Sample invites are available and can be modified for your use.