

Mozilla lab wants scientists to step out of analog age

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mozilla
FOUNDATION

(Phys.org) —Talk about big ideas. Not satisfied to rest on laurels of having brought forth the open source browser Firefox, Mozilla—defined by some as a global project, by others as one of the key open-source movements, is thinking big, really big, about changing the world of scientists. This month Mozilla announced that it is launching the Mozilla Science Lab, with support from the Alfred Sloan Foundation. According

to a [blog post](#) by Foundation executive director, Marc Surman, Mozilla is creating a Science Lab for researchers around the world.

The idea is to enable researchers to more easily (1) be in a virtual place where they share ideas, tools and best practices for using next-generation web solutions to solve problems in science, and (2) to make this an exploration as to how to make research faster, more agile and collaborative. But, here's the problem. Mozilla is ready to get started, but are scientists ready to get started? Surman wrote, "Scientists created the web—but the [open web](#) still hasn't transformed scientific practice to the same extent we've seen in other areas like media, education and business. For all of the incredible discoveries of the last century, science is still largely rooted in the 'analog' age."

This is 2013 and the style of scientific work is in a time warp, say critics who wish there was a different type of work environment. The researcher may conduct research and submit findings in the form of a paper to a peer-review journal; upon publication the world will see what was achieved. While developers easily share tips and observations in online community groups that push projects and solutions ahead, scientists elsewhere may feel the pressure of sticking to a publish-the-paper path and hang back from working in a global collaborative environment. The Lab's team is ready for the challenge. "In scientific research, we're dealing with special circumstances, trying to innovate upon hundreds of years of entrenched norms and practices, broken incentive structures and gaps in training that are dramatically slowing down the system, keeping us from making the steps forward needed to better society."

A basic step forward will be providing digital literacy for scientists. Sharing, re-using and producing research on the web involves computer skills they may not yet have. Software Carpentry will be a member of the lab team for this purpose. According to the announcement, "As part of

the Mozilla Science Lab, Software Carpentry will explore what 'digital literacy' means for scientific researchers and how these digital skills can further aid their work." Kaitlin Thaney is the director of the Mozilla [Science Lab](#).

Software Carpentry, a volunteer organization supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Mozilla Foundation, teaches basic computing skills. They operate through two-day boot camps for scientists.

Organizations have supported their efforts since they ran their first class at Los Alamos National Laboratory in 1998. Learners are typically graduate students in science, engineering, and medicine who have written a few lines of code either on their own or for a class as undergrads, but are not familiar with practices in scientific computing such as version control or unit testing.)

With or without the Mozilla effort, however, there is a sense that scientists are moving toward a collaborative model; at least some scientists believe that it is the obvious way of the future in an Internet-connected world. ResearchGate, the networking site for scientists, is given as an example. ResearchGate began in 2008, by scientists for scientists. Its founders, physicians and a computer scientist, have seen its membership grow considerably.

ResearchGate is used by researchers who can present their work, share publications, connect with specialists in their field, ask questions, and get answers about research issues.

More information: www.researchgate.net/
www.nytimes.com/2012/01/17/sci...?pagewanted=all&r=0
wiki.mozilla.org/ScienceLab

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