

Scientists eager to participate in public discourse on environment

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A survey of more than 500 researchers indicates that scientists have the desire to get more involved in public discussion and policy decisions regarding environmental issues, but have concerns about how their efforts might be perceived.

"Scientists debate whether they have a role in advocacy," says Gerald Singh, a PhD student in the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at UBC, who conducted the survey with his colleagues. "Some feel they need to remain objective and can't engage. Others feel they have a duty to get involved so that decisions are made with the environment in mind."

The results show that scientists overwhelmingly support outreach efforts. Ninety-eight per cent of participants said they would be willing to advocate for a policy if they felt there was sufficient scientific evidence to support their position. However, many participants also indicated they were concerned that their peers would disapprove of this type of activity.

"We wanted to push our colleagues beyond this polarized debate. Our research demonstrates that if scientists choose to engage with the public, their choice is well supported by the larger scientific community," says Singh.

The results also found that confidence played a big role in whether researchers were willing to get involved. Those who felt they were good at reaching out did so more often while negative experiences turned

people off.

"We identified some of the barriers that prevent [scientists](#) from engaging," says Singh. "It turns out that one of the biggest barriers is whether they perceive themselves as competent."

Singh suggests that researchers take part in communication training early in their career to boost confidence and to avoid the likelihood of a [negative experience](#).

The results of the survey were published this week in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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