

Day 3: Wednesday, December 14, 2005

1:30 PM - PANEL DISCUSSION: *NSF Education*

Moderators: Robert Westervelt (Harvard U.) and Larry Bell (Museum of Science, Boston)

The NSEC focusing on the Science of Nanoscale Systems and their Device Applications is a collaboration among Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California—Santa Barbara, and the Museum of Science—Boston. Through a close integration of research, education, and public outreach, the Center encourages and promotes the training of a diverse group of people to be leaders in this new interdisciplinary field.

In connection with an Informal Education and Public Engagement component of the educational strategy, Museum of Science staff develop innovative science communication strategies for enhancing public understanding of research in nanoscale science and engineering, engaging a broad range of audiences at the Museum of Science and elsewhere. Some of the activities undertaken this past year have included live presentations in the Museum's Current Science and Technology Center, monthly "Sci-Tech in the News" features on New England Cable News, guest researcher presentations at the Museum of Science, exhibits and displays, multimedia research updates on touch screens in the Museum and on the web, a Nanotech Symposium for Teachers and Guidance Counselors, as well as a variety of sessions at professional meetings that focus on informal science education and public engagement.

Based on its experience in working with Harvard, the Museum of Science developed a proposal to NSF and on October 1 was awarded a cooperative agreement to lead a national effort in Nanoscale Informal Science Education (NISE). The NISE Net is intended to foster public awareness, engagement, and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology through establishment of a national infrastructure that links science museums and other informal science education organizations with nanoscale science and engineering research organizations. The goals of the Network are to:

- Create a sustainable service-oriented infrastructure that supports long-term efforts to educate the public about nanoscale science, engineering, and technology, as well as build capacity in the field and within participating institutions.
- Strategically plan, develop, implement, and disseminate educational deliverables of all kinds that foster greater engagement with and understanding of nanoscale science, engineering, and technology in a comprehensive way by the general public, as well as K-12 school groups.
- Stimulate educational research and evaluation that add to the nanoscale informal science education knowledge base, inform continuous improvement of both products and processes, and guide the development of future deliverables.

For this 5-year NSF-funded effort, the Museum of Science in Boston is the lead institution working in partnership with the Exploratorium in San Francisco and the Science Museum of Minnesota in St. Paul to form the core leadership team for the project. An additional 10 organizational partners, 22+ "thinking partners", 14 advisors, and 2 evaluation firms form the initial fabric of the network.