

South African Public Relationship with Science Conference



Making sure it's possible

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

26-27 March 2025

Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre



In December 2024, at the launch of the annual Science Forum South Africa, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation released the report of the first South African Public Relationship with Science Survey, which was conducted in 2022. The survey, which is to be conducted every five years, uses internationally benchmarked indicators to assesses how close South Africa is to becoming a science-aware and science-literate society.

In its efforts to disseminate the report findings as widely as possible, the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation held a national conference to afford key sectors of society the opportunity to reflect on the report's findings and share their thoughts, including through robust discussions in breakaway groups. All conference delegates had the opportunity to discuss all the topics under consideration. The consolidated recommendations arising from the group discussions are set out below.

1. [Curiosity, inquiry and evidence-based decision-making and behaviours](#) should be ingrained in both the personal and professional domains through the science engagement programme.
2. [Intergovernmental cooperation is necessary](#) to advance the objectives of the science engagement programme, and the mandates of other government departments should be strengthened through science engagement, for example, encouraging the teaching and learning of mathematics, science and technology.
3. Regardless of the communication channels used, the science engagement programme should be founded on [responsible science communication](#), with suitable mechanisms put in place to ensure that the public is guaranteed access to [accurate information from trustworthy sources](#).
4. The survey results indicate that access to science information is still a privilege afforded mostly to the country's young, educated and affluent. This needs to change. [Access to science information should be regarded as the public's right](#).
5. It is important to [maximise the use of popular media outlets](#), especially television and radio, to communicate science to the public.

6. Science communication should take into consideration South Africa's linguistic diversity and make sure that [all local languages are used in science engagement](#).
7. To expand the science engagement programme, strategies should be developed to support and promote [public access to science engagement facilities](#). These strategies should also go beyond traditional science engagement facilities to include other spaces where people can interact with science, such as homes.
8. To advance the goals of the science engagement programme and encourage knowledge co-production between scientists and non-professionals, [citizen science ought to be embedded in the programme](#).
9. The science engagement programme should have a [strong science for society component](#), which includes applying scientific research and knowledge to address societal issues, for example, fostering an understanding of natural phenomena and the provision of early warning signals to aid in public preparation for disasters like those brought on by climate change.
10. The science engagement programme should continue to include a substantial [indigenous knowledge systems component](#).
11. It is important to [encourage scientists to take part in science outreach initiatives](#) and public engagement with science in their local communities.
12. The current science engagement policies are still relevant, but their implementation has to be stepped up by [democratising the programme, expanding its reach and promoting diversity](#), among other things.

The conference outcomes are considered stakeholders' advice to the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation as the custodian of science engagement in South Africa. The Department will use these outcomes to inform the planning for its science engagement campaigns and the next South African Public Relationship with Science Survey.