

Fellows Organize to Explore, Celebrate, and Expand Diversity



Left to Right: Tiffani Bailey Lash, Janis Johnston , Anne Fischer, José Zambrana, Lekelia (Kiki) Jenkins

Tiffani Bailey Lash, PhD, Chemistry, North Carolina State University

2007-09 Health, Education & Human Services Fellow, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of General Medical Sciences

Lekelia (Kiki) Jenkins, PhD, Marine Conservation, Duke University

2007-09 Energy, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Fellow, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of International Affairs

Anne Fischer, PhD, Chemistry, Michigan State University

2007-09 Health, Education & Human Services Fellow, National Science Foundation, Division of Human Resource Development

Janis Johnston, PhD, Sociology, Colorado State University

2007-09 Energy, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Fellow, Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development, National Homeland Security Research Center

José Zambrana, PhD, Chemistry, City University of New York

2007-09 Energy, Environment, Agriculture & Natural Resources Fellow, Environmental Protection Agency, National Center for Environmental Research

Five AAAS Fellows, as diverse as the topic they were interested in promoting, planned and presented a half-day workshop in June 2008, which explored strategies to increase diversity in the science and technology workforce.

Lekelia (Kiki) Jenkins, serving at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), put forth the idea because she “has benefited greatly from diversity programs” throughout her career, and she wanted to give others the tools they need to help build an inclusive scientific community.

The proposal was immediately embraced by José Zambrana, a Fellow at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), because it was related to the work he was doing at EPA’s National Center for Environmental Research, and because it reflected his own interests. Tiffani Bailey Lash was a natural to join the group as her fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, focused on biomedical workforce diversity.

Anne Fischer, who serves at the National Science Foundation Division of Human Resource Development, had been involved in a number of outreach and mentoring programs for underrepresented groups while in college and graduate school, and her expertise was tapped as well. Janis Johnston, another Fellow at EPA, had taught courses in social inequality, social stratification and medical sociology, as well as courses in statistics and social research methods. She was the right person to guide the creation of a survey for the broad fellowship cohort to assess their interests and knowledge in championing diversity.

Over the course of eight months, the five Fellows surveyed their peers, identified needs, collected resources, collaborated with staff from the AAAS Division of Education and Human Resources to develop the agenda, recruited speakers, and then promoted the workshop. The program was designed around three aspects of diversity: race/ethnicity, gender, and disability.

The *Championing Diversity in Science and Engineering* workshop opened with a keynote presentation from Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), who has proposed legislation supporting diversity in education and scientific assessment. She stressed the importance nationally of expanding equality

and diversity on review panels, among university faculty, and in graduate schools. Panelists included:

- Daryl Chubin, director, AAAS Center for Advancing Science & Engineering Capacity
- Larry Crowder, Stephen Toth Professor of Marine Biology, Duke University
- Shannon Franks, faculty researcher in the Geography Department at the University of Maryland
- Yolanda George, deputy director, AAAS Education and Human Resources Programs
- Antoinette Torres, assistant vice-provost and executive director for academic advising, retention and diversity, Drexel University
- Virginia Stern, director, AAAS Project on Science, Technology, and Disability
- Laureen Summers, program associate, AAAS ENTRYPOINT! Program

In addition to sharing firsthand experiences and highlighting challenges, discussion groups explored specific actions that foster and support diversity and challenge traditional barriers to equal access and opportunity. These included methods to increase institutions’ stake in diversity; address students’ financial needs; find and train supportive mentors; and to break down false perceptions and expectations based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and age, among others.

In its inaugural year, the Championing Diversity event was one of more than 20 professional development workshops held for the S&T Policy Fellows. It also attracted some of the Fellows’ coworkers, as well as representatives from nonprofit organizations and academia.

“The workshop provided some new ideas and tools,” said Kiki, “so that S&T Policy Fellows can open the minds of others to the benefits of working in an environment that embraces diversity.”