

# The Role of Decision-Relevant Research

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Eric Toman, one of the first AAAS Fellows at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), brought an unusual background to an agency with an emphasis on marine issues—he had spent nearly eight years conducting research on wildfires. He accepted a placement with the Climate Program Office because of the opportunity to work on “an important topic at an important time.”

The office plays a key role in U.S. participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Prior to the 13th Conference of the Parties, in Indonesia, Eric helped organize the U.S. contribution, including drafting position statements on climate change adaptation. He also supported negotiations on adaptation through research and observations at the U.N. Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice meetings held in Germany. Eric was one of the authors of a report by the U.S. Climate Change Science Program that drew together findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and those of U.S. scientists assessing the ongoing and projected effects of climate change on the United States. He also supported NOAA’s efforts to advance a National Climate Service.

On a team of scientists and

managers from across NOAA, Eric learned about “existing decision-making needs and the importance of balancing inquiry-driven and use-inspired research.

“The AAAS Fellowship provided critical insight into federal agencies and an inside perspective on the factors that influence decision making,” Eric says. That confirmed the “important role scientists can play in addressing some of the major problems facing us today. I now feel an even greater responsibility to conduct decision-relevant research and do a better job illustrating the relevance of research results to real-world issues,” he explains. Eric is putting that sense of responsibility into practice in his new position on the faculty of the School of Environment and Natural Resources at Ohio State University.

He also gained a new appreciation for the balance of work and family life. Eric moved to Washington with his wife, Elizabeth, and their first child was born early in his fellowship year. Although juggling commitments was challenging at times, Eric credited coming home to his family with providing much needed perspective after long hours of negotiations or technical writing and editing.

“Having a valuable professional development opportunity at NOAA and starting a family at the same time made this an exceptional year.”

