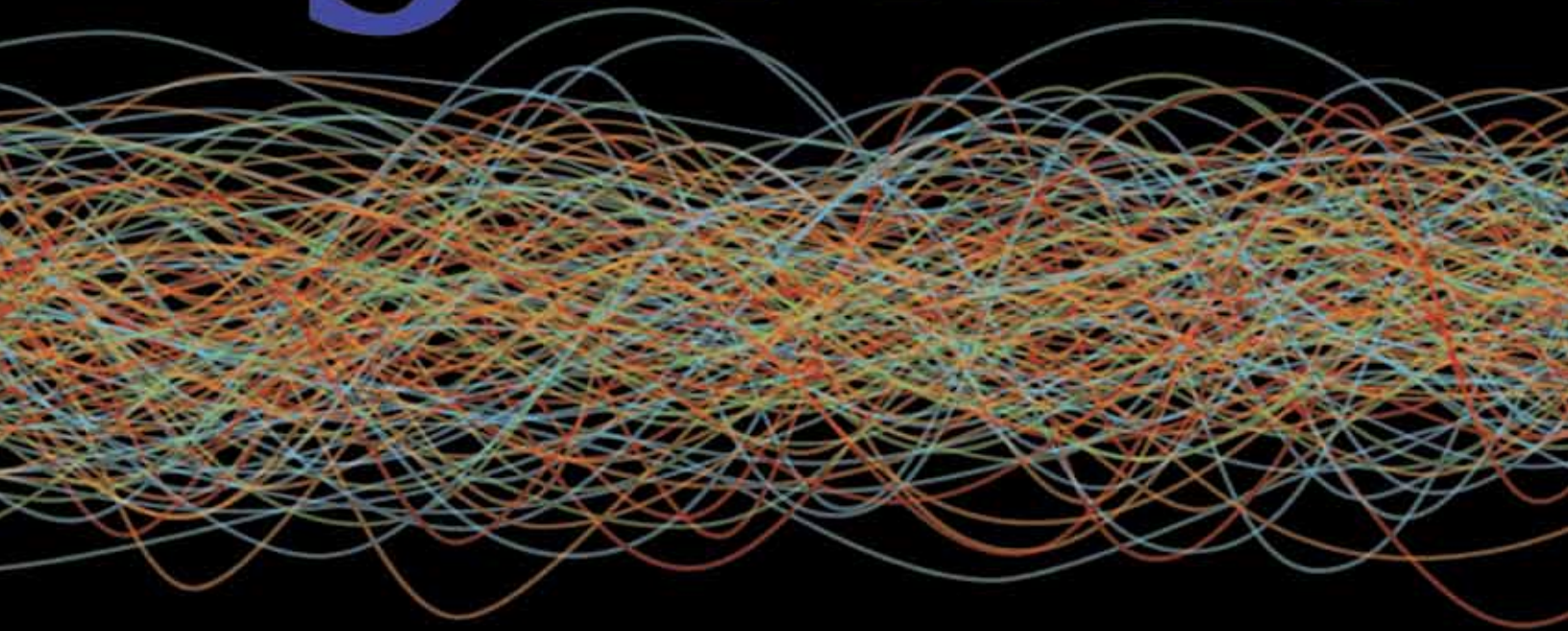


# THE HUMAN SPARK



**STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIONS  
BETWEEN PUBLIC TELEVISION STATIONS  
AND SCIENCE MUSEUMS:**

**LESSONS FROM THE HUMAN SPARK  
NATIONAL OUTREACH INITIATIVE**



ollaborative partnerships between public television stations and science museums have advantageous potential for both organizations. When the organizations can form true partnerships based on shared missions, maintain clear channels of communication, and share resources to develop complementary content, the effects can be long-term and mutually beneficial.

Educational and community outreach initiatives between public television stations and science museums provide an ideal arena for building these partnerships. Museums can provide public television stations with quality venues and event space, access to audiences already interested and invested in science content, and hands-on experiences that make the concepts of public television programming concrete. Public television stations can provide museums with quality educational content, the opportunity to create “high profile” events with the potential to draw new visitors to museums, and the prospect of presenting museum content in fresh and innovative ways.

As the two organizations cultivate relationships, opportunities for collaborations will continue to present themselves as new

short on funds or resources — materials and assets for their visitors. To truly benefit from the partnership, however, collaborative efforts must address each organization’s strengths and needs, and provide each with the opportunity to advance its mission.

While it may appear the benefits of station/museum partnerships are obvious, collaborations between the two organizations have historically proven to be complicated and haphazard. Too often, public television programming and associated outreach initiatives have had, at best, a tangential relationship to museum offerings; it is rare that public television content is robustly and thoroughly integrated into museum content, exhibits, events or activities. In November 2004, Ron Thorpe, the Vice President and Director of Education at WNET.ORG, public television’s flagship station in New York City, convened a conversation among educators around the United States. The participants discussed the most commonly-encountered challenges to fruitful public television/science museum collaborations, including:

- Public television stations frequently seek to collaborate with museums late in the production process, denying museums adequate time for robust integration;
- Public television stations provide inadequate funding to already-struggling museums;
- Public television outreach funding cycles are out-of-sync with museum content creation cycles; and

# Introduction

content is developed. As Graham Farnelo describes in his 2004 book *Creating Connections: Museums and the Public Understanding of Current Research*, by continuing to incorporate public television content into science museum content, the museum becomes a “live interface between contemporary research and the public, something no other medium can provide.” Building public television content and outreach events into museum offerings increases foot traffic and attendance at the museum<sup>1</sup>, as well as exposing new audiences to the content. When projects have adequate funding, stations can also provide museums — which may be

- Public television stations bring pre-packaged content to museums expecting them to utilize it, with no consideration of museum content or structure.

At the 2003 Conference on US-Japan Public Understanding of Science and Research, a science museum representative commented, regarding collaboration with public television stations, “There is never enough time. There is never enough money. There is never an opportunity for museums to give input on what we want or how we can use the PBS content.”

<sup>1</sup> WNET.ORG-hosted *Super Cyberchase Day* at the New York Hall of Science illustrates this phenomenon. Attendance at the museum on 1/24/2008 was approximately 1,500 visitors; the next year when SCD was held on 1/24/2009 the museum attendance more than doubled to 3,371 visitors. Similarly, museum attendance on 5/1/2009 was 672; the next year when SCD was held on 5/1/2010 museum attendance more than quadrupled to 2,749 visitors.

# INCORPORATING PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION/SCIENCE MUSEUM COLLABORATION INTO BROADCAST-BASED OUTREACH INITIATIVES

The LAB@Thirteen, WNET.ORG's Educational and Community Outreach Department, sought to address these obstacles and barriers in the ambitious, multifaceted and long-term national outreach campaign surrounding the primetime PBS series *The Human Spark*. In order to engage public television stations and science museums, the LAB needed the outreach campaign to address three main challenges:

1. Provision of adequate financial support
2. Provision of adequate time to develop a plan and effectively execute the plan
3. Provision of video and other materials to complement rather than complicate museum collections and event schedules.

*The Human Spark*, originally broadcast on PBS in January 2010, is a three part series hosted by Alan Alda, exploring the origin and nature of what makes us human. Mr. Alda visited dozens of scientists on three continents, and participated directly in many experiments — including the detailed examination of his own brain — to discover “the human spark” through a variety of topics: the decline of Neanderthals, the development of humans’ social networking and technological skills, the study of humans’ closest primate relatives, the correlation between human uniqueness and the ability to reason, the ability to create civilizations, and the exploration of the human brain, including language mechanisms and the ability to make and use complex tools.



The LAB@Thirteen and the producers of *The Human Spark* saw the series content as a natural opportunity to engage public television stations and science museums nationwide, and to support meaningful and dynamic collaborations between the two organizations. The goals of the outreach initiative, as set forth in a proposal to the National Science Foundation, were to:

- Create a new standard for collaborations between science museums and public television stations;
- Increase knowledge about how science museums can use quality video resources in engaging the public in a better understanding of science;
- Create new models to build adult museum and station audience membership;
- Encourage collaborations that lead to long-term benefits.

The national outreach initiative, as directed by the LAB@Thirteen, was structured as follows:

## Tier 1 Public Television Station/Science Museum Partnerships

In March 2008, the LAB@Thirteen posted a Request for Proposals to public television stations nationwide. Stations were asked to identify a science museum partner and create potential collaboration ideas, local promotion and publicity plans, potential special events, tactics for local fundraising, and strategies for reaching underserved audiences. After reviewing the proposals, three station/museum partnership sites were chosen to receive \$35,000 outreach grants, \$10,000 of which supported station participation, and \$25,000 of which supported museum participation. Each site would also receive an appearance by Alan Alda at one of their outreach events. A fourth Tier 1 site received a \$10,000 grant and no visit from Mr. Alda.

## Planning and Development of Tier 1 Activities

Representatives from the Tier 1 public television stations and science museums met at WNET.ORG's studios in New York City for a project kickoff meeting in May 2008, during which *The Human Spark* production team, LAB@Thirteen staff and site representatives discussed potential models for collaboration and shared strategies for integrating the series into long-range plans and activities. Over the next several months, with an undefined series air date, the Tier 1 sites developed comprehensive plans for collaborative efforts on events, exhibit materials, activities, and promotions to support *The Human Spark*.

## Tier 2 Station/Museum Partnerships

Informed by the outreach ideas presented in the Tier 1 site collaboration plans, the LAB@Thirteen created and posted a Request for Proposals for a second round of outreach grants. In July 2009, five station/museum partnership sites were awarded \$10,000 outreach grants, which did not give access to on-site appearances by Alan Alda, nor was the distribution of funds between the two organizations pre-determined.

## Further Development and Execution of Outreach Activities:

Between July 2009 and January 2010, stations refined their proposed plans and implemented their outreach activities and events. These included museum “after hours” events, professional development workshops for educators, promotions at regional conferences, museum family days, local festivals and community events, VIP donor receptions, screenings, lecture series, science cafés, student workshops, local theater productions, construction of museum exhibits and kiosks, creation of original television and radio programming, and multimedia publicity and promotions.

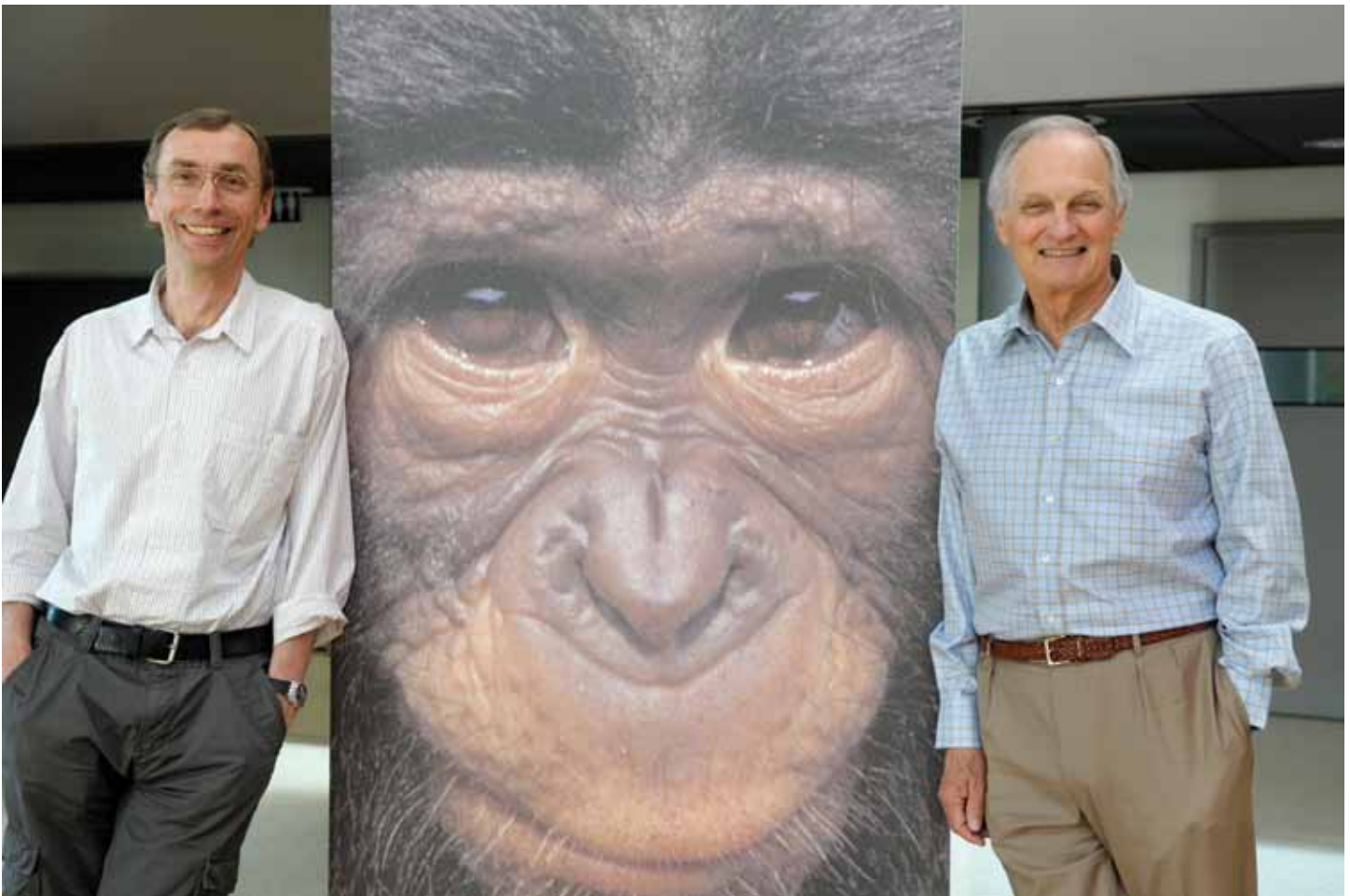
All sites received print materials and video assets from WNET.ORG to support their local outreach initiatives.

In June 2009, PBS announced that the series would air in November 2009, making it difficult for WNET and the museum partners to meet their goals. Then, in September 2009, PBS changed its plans and informed *The Human Spark* producers and the LAB@Thirteen that the series would not air until January 2010. This last-minute decision-making put a strain on the outreach planning.

Public television station and science museum grantees were eager to accept and work to achieve the goals of the project. Of the nine total partnerships involved in the outreach initiative,

all but one had collaborated previously, and were aware of the potential challenges to successful collaboration. Throughout the project, sites kept the LAB@Thirteen updated on their status through a series of activity reports and surveys. Upon completion of the project, an independent research firm conducted an evaluation of the project, and submitted a final report to WNET.ORG in April 2010.<sup>2</sup>

This document examines and explores the reactions and feedback from the nine public television station/science museum partnership sites that participated in the national outreach initiative surrounding *The Human Spark*, and addresses important questions about the challenges and obstacles to embarking on large scale, meaningful collaborative projects between the organizations.



<sup>2</sup>All quotations and statistics, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Multimedia Research report, "*The Human Spark* Outreach: collaboration between PBS stations and museums." 4/21/10 which summarizes the contents of all reports submitted by sites throughout the course of the project.

# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FIXED TIMETABLES AND PRODUCTION SCHEDULES, SUITABLE FOR ALL PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

**D**ue to the extended schedule for the national outreach initiative as developed by the LAB@Thirteen and *The Human Spark* production team, different sites had different timetables during which they were expected to develop and execute their outreach activities.

For the Tier 1 stations, 22 months passed from the time they submitted their initial proposals to the time they submitted their final reports in March 2010. The organizations

certainly did not complain there was a shortage of time for their outreach activities; on the contrary, one site representative

commented, “Working on a project for two years is a long time to keep the enthusiasm up. I think a year would have been sufficient.” Conversely, the Tier 2 stations only had six months between being awarded the outreach grant and the series air date in which to plan and execute their outreach events. Those sites expressed that they would have liked more time to work on the project in order to be able to present at conferences, participate in professional development opportunities for educators, and adhere to media and print publication deadlines in order to better promote the series and outreach activities. Most sites suggested that in order to accommodate rapid public television outreach schedules, slower museum production schedules and external deadlines, a one-year timetable would be ideal for this type of outreach project.

PBS’s ongoing delays in determining the broadcast dates for the series was the most difficult issue for this project. When Tier 1 of the project launched in May 2008, broadcast dates were yet to be determined. Sites were skeptical of this uncertainty, but were assured that as soon as broadcast dates were established they would be shared. It wasn’t until over a year later, in June 2009, that WNET.ORG learned the series would be broadcast in November 2009. With that information, Tier 1 sites began planning their large-scale events, at which Alan Alda would appear, and the Tier 2 sites developed their proposals. In September of 2009, PBS informed WNET.ORG *The Human Spark* would not be broadcast until January 2010.

The postponement of the series broadcast not only dampened the stations’ enthusiasm for the project, but negatively affected planned activities. The three large-scale events with Alan Alda

— firmly planned for October, based on venue availability and Mr. Alda’s schedule — were no longer held in close proximity to the series’ broadcast. Print schedules were disrupted, preventing sites from most effectively promoting the series and outreach activities in local media outlets. Some sites mentioned that in order to match the adjusted broadcast schedule, it was necessary to reschedule their events during the holiday season, resulting in low attendance. Unsurprisingly, the response to the

“The timeline we had was certainly workable, but a year is ideal to make best use of...both organizations.”

indeterminate broadcast dates and their effect on the activities was overwhelmingly negative. In order for any outreach project supporting a broadcast program or series to reach its full potential, firm broadcast dates must be established and communicated as early as possible.

# CLEAR AND OPEN CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATION AND RESOURCE SHARING ARE INTEGRAL FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS.



At the beginning of the national outreach initiative in May 2008, the LAB@Thirteen set the stage for effective communication with the web-based collaboration tool Basecamp. In addition to the regular telephone and email communications, Basecamp offered an efficient way to communicate with all partner representatives simultaneously to send messages, share files and facilitate discussions. LAB@Thirteen staff communicated

with individual station representatives through frequent phone calls and emails; museum representatives tended to obtain

of their collaboration. Partners must realize there is more to effective collaboration than simply drawing up schedules and splitting bills — each organization needs to take the time to assess and understand each others' strengths, weaknesses, needs, and missions. Early in the collaboration process, beginning with the development of a proposal, public television station and science museum representatives must meet and establish what each organization will offer to the project, and how each organization will benefit from participation.

Another important aspect of inter-site communication in a project such as *The Human Spark* is the capacity for sharing original resources developed by sites to support local outreach activities. Stations creating localized programming tied to national broadcasts should ensure programs are accessible to the entire public broadcasting system. Museums developing

“The partnership was a fair and balanced effort, with each organization tapping into its own area of expertise to contribute to the success of the event.”

information through their station partners rather than from the LAB directly. Local station and museum representatives found that face-to-face meetings were the most effective way to work together. One aspect of the project sites did not find useful for communications was the Tier 1 project kickoff meeting in New York City. Sites did not feel the expenses associated with traveling to and hosting the meeting were warranted, as it added little, if anything, to their understanding of the project or the other partners.

It is tremendously important that partner organizations maintain clear communications with each other throughout the duration

exhibit materials should find channels through which to distribute the materials — or at the very least their plans — to other science museums. This aspect of resource sharing could have been more robustly integrated into *The Human Spark* outreach initiative. In final reports, many sites commented they wished a video kiosk “template” had been available for use by all participating museums. At the same time, one site reported that their museum developed a video kiosk template, implemented it in their museum, and wished other stations had asked to use it! A clearly defined and efficient system for sharing original resources needs to be in place, especially when sites are creating valuable and interesting materials that can be utilized nationwide.

# STATIONS AND MUSEUMS REACHED OVER HALF A MILLION PEOPLE THROUGH INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES TAILORED TO LOCAL AUDIENCES

“Our Science Cafés were led by an expert university professor, so we were able to attract the college students from the universities. 50% of our participants were college students. Most of the students had never been to the museum.”

A significant takeaway from *The Human Spark* outreach initiative is the evidence that when sites are given the freedom to assess their markets and develop outreach campaigns specifically suited to their communities, rather than adhering to a laundry list of strictly-defined deliverables, the results are overwhelmingly positive. Each of the nine outreach sites approached their local initiatives in a different way, and each was satisfied with the outcome. Many sites saw the potential in “piggy-backing” onto already-existing local events, such as educator conferences, community book fairs, public radio talk shows, television newsmagazine programs, science cafés, and free- or discounted-admission days at museums. By distributing WNET-branded posters, postcards and bookmarks, original print materials, and conducting face-to-face interactions with people, sites were able to reach diverse populations who otherwise would not have been aware of *The Human Spark*.

Many sites also incorporated a great deal of video content into their outreach work. Several showed series episodes in museum lobbies during discounted-admission and family days, another showed the series trailer before films in the museum theater. Sites also showed segments from the series at screening events, posted segments on local *Human Spark* companion websites, and incorporated segments into museum exhibits. Three Tier 1 sites produced original, local television programs to accompany the series.

The flexible structure of this outreach initiative also allowed site partners to approach outreach plans in new ways, and experiment with new outreach formats. One station/museum partner site hosted a joint major donor event, something neither organization had attempted before. Several sites hosted science cafés, a format new to some of the science museums and most of the public television stations. Many participating museums had never utilized PBS content in their exhibits before. Organizations targeted audiences to whom they would not have ordinarily reached out, such as single young adults, minority populations, and low-literacy high school students. Stations and museums partnered to host educator workshops for the first time, leading one site representative to comment, “Introducing [the museum] to *The Human Spark* program created extraordinary interest in including the workshop we hosted into their on-site educational program

permanently.” Many sites saw the benefits of holding events aimed at teachers and families, rather than general audiences.

Interestingly, the one aspect of the national outreach initiative mandated by WNET — increasing membership — was deemed least effective by the sites. The local outreach campaigns did not result in an increase in station and/or museum membership. Many sites felt uncomfortable “pushing” membership at events, and commented that the types of events they held as part of this initiative were not the type of events that typically inspired people to enroll in station membership. Sites found that while they did make membership information available, events were more effective for reinforcing current membership.

Sites also needed to address the challenge of incorporating PBS content into museum offerings, and they approached the issue in a variety of ways. One Tier 1 museum created a new exhibit using *The Human Spark*-related artifacts from the museum’s collection, segments from the series and segments from a Jane Goodall film, and placed the exhibit near an auditorium showing a film about chimpanzees. At a Tier 2 museum, the educational programming staff used video segments, activities and demos as a way to facilitate discussion about *The Human Spark* with 10 teachers and 200 students at a museum workshop. Several museums developed methods for incorporating *The Human Spark* video content into existing exhibits or kiosks. One museum approached the challenge in yet another innovative way, explaining that “While we do not have any strongly relating exhibits on display now, it was a natural fit for our Lecture Series audience.”

While sites do not ask for — nor require, as shown — strict guidelines for developing outreach plans, they do need and request specific materials to support their activities. The LAB@Thirteen provided all stations with nationally-branded print materials — posters, postcards, bookmarks — for distribution; nearly all stations commented that they would have appreciated a way to include local branding on the print pieces as well. For future projects, print pieces can be created with a blank space in which sites can place a stamp or a sticker, or sites can be sent customizable digital files to print locally. Sites also requested hands-on interactive materials or activities be developed to accompany video segments.

# ENGAGE LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO LOCALIZE CONTENT AND ATTRACT LOCAL AUDIENCES



Collaboration between a public television station and science museum need not be limited solely to those two organizations. An effective way to expand reach into the community is to see if other local organizations – universities, zoos, research centers, libraries, professional associations – have additional assets or programs to contribute to the project. This serves not only to expose new community audiences to the outreach initiative and

provide additional chances to promote the series and outreach, but to add to the content of the project. Engaging local experts or faculty from additional organizations is an effective way to

relate the content of a national program to the community. Additionally, connecting with viewers on an individual level is a powerful method of building an audience. Sites used different means of engaging viewers directly, from facilitating discussions on social media outlets to filming “person-on-the-street” interviews for a museum exhibit.

Local viewers also tend to engage more fully with national productions when there is some sort of local connection. One

Tier 1 site created a half-hour companion program featuring only local experts and university faculty. Another filmed the panel discussion from their screening event and aired it following the first episode of *The Human Spark*; an extended Q&A podcast was posted on the station’s local *Human Spark* website. Two sites hosted radio shows in which callers could speak to local experts. Of all the outreach activities that took place as part of the national initiative, half utilized the talents of local experts, panelists and moderators to provide community connections

and interpretations for the themes and content of *The Human Spark*.

While not emphasized in the original goals of the project, *The Human Spark* outreach activities did have an impact on educators and students. The sites

that conducted school workshops and professional development events saw an excellent response from participants. The educators were exposed to new classroom resources, and the students were provided with “the opportunity to engage in experiences outside of the classroom, and [the workshop] sparked their curiosity in what it means to be human.” In addition to the benefits directly associated with *The Human Spark* content, this type of outreach event allowed the science museums and public television stations to promote their other educational offerings.

“I think it’s just a factor of keeping our eyes and minds open to the best cross-over opportunities.”



# PROVIDE SITES WITH ACCESS TO SERIES TALENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

“...it showcased the museum’s ability to contribute meaningfully to a project like this — with widespread appeal and a national footprint.”

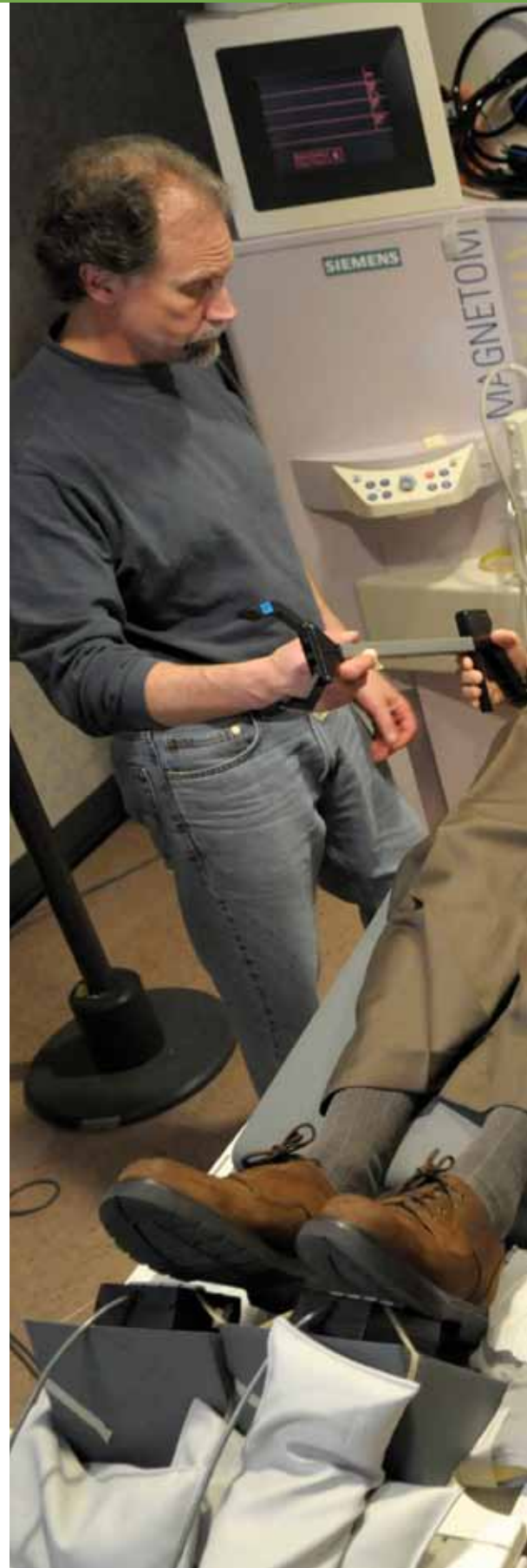
# A

s part of his responsibilities as host of *The Human Spark*, Alan Alda generously agreed to visit three Tier 1 sites and participate in their large-scale outreach events. All of these sites were very happy to welcome Mr. Alda into their communities. Each of the sites incorporated the appearance into a reception/screening event, where Mr. Alda and series executive producer Graham Chedd spoke about the series and participated in a panel discussion with local experts. All of the sites reported events were filled to capacity and the participants were fully engaged in the science content. One site reported the “celebrity” appearance helped attract the local press, boosting publicity for the series and following outreach events.

The remaining six sites that did not receive visits from

Mr. Alda mentioned that they felt an appearance would have benefited their local outreach campaigns, as they believed that a national celebrity tends to garner more interest than a local expert.

The incorporation of outreach appearances into Mr. Alda’s original agreement ensured that he was able to provide the Tier 1 sites with those benefits. This is a great boost to the outreach initiative that can easily become the standard in talent contracts for future series and outreach campaigns.



# THE UTILIZATION OF SERIES CONTENT IN A VARIETY OF WAYS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE OUTREACH INITIATIVE



“Video tells powerful stories. Creating local relevance generates even greater excitement”

A

As part of the national *Human Spark* outreach initiative, the LAB@Thirteen sought to address the complaint frequently heard from museums that public television stations bring them pre-packaged video which may not be compatible with museum content. To this end, stations and museum partner sites were given the opportunity to view each episode of the series well in advance of the broadcast date, and encouraged to request video segments that would best fit their specific outreach plans. Unfortunately, this plan proved to be less desirable to the sites than anticipated. Many sites had planned to build content and recruit local experts around whichever pre-packaged segments they assumed WNET.ORG would

provide, based on previous experiences working on broadcast-based outreach campaigns, and were at a loss when expected to choose segments to “start from scratch.” Compounding the problem was the fact that the series talent preferred to select their own segments for their appearances, which was not known until shortly before the appearances were scheduled to occur.

Ultimately, the response to the LAB@Thirteen’s call for requested segments was tepid. Sites all received the segments selected by the series talent and a 30-second trailer; the few that did make selections received those segments as well. For future outreach initiatives of a similar nature, it would be most effective to give sites both options: provide a selection of approved segments and trailers, as well as the resources to select additional segments as necessary to best align with existing content. Additionally, it is essential that all video available to sites for use in outreach activities must have appropriate rights clearance for use in all media formats.

Despite difficulties, all sites reported the incorporation of video content into their outreach activities was successful. The video from *The Human Spark* inspired the development of hands-on activities and production of local video for on-air and exhibits, reinforcing the impact and expanding the audience reached by the project. One Tier 2 museum that was initially not interested in integrating video into their “interactive place” became a convert to the advantages of video usage, reporting, “We’re going to test using some video on a daily public museum program. I can see how it will help the audience understand and make the science more current.” The sites did mention that integration of the video content was more natural for museums that had existing exhibits or resources that related to themes in *The Human Spark*. However, even those museums that had difficulties incorporating *The Human Spark* into exhibits were able to showcase the series in other ways, such as on their websites and in e-newsletters. It may be beneficial for museums to compare their existing content with the public television content highlighted in any given outreach initiative before entering into a broadcast-based collaborative partnership.

## OUTREACH GRANTS ADEQUATELY COVERED DIRECT COSTS OF THE PROJECT, WHILE THE INDIRECT COSTS REMAINED LARGELY UNFUNDED

“Without the financial help from WNET, we would not have been able to move forward with the collaboration, so we were truly grateful.”

S

uccessful, large-scale outreach initiatives require grants that are sufficient for the size and scope of the project. Addressing concerns that science museums were underfunded on collaborations with public television stations, WNET determined the Tier 1 partnership grants would be in the unprecedented amount of \$35,000, with nearly 75% of that amount passing through stations to the science museum partner. Nevertheless, this amount was insufficient to cover all costs associated with the project. While both Tier 1 and Tier 2 sites reported the grant funding covered direct costs for their activities — printing,

catering, media and exhibit production, speaker fees, online and print promotions, materials, transportation — indirect costs such as staff time and facilities usage were “in-kind” contributions from the stations and museums. This had an adverse effect on the organizations, as the project consumed a good deal of staff time for project administration and communications.

When sites require additional funding for planned outreach activities, approaching other local organizations with an interest in the content or themes of the programming can be extremely productive. Over half of the sites participating in *The Human Spark* national outreach campaign recruited additional local funding or support for their activities. Large scale events and series talent appearances can be particularly valuable as leverage for local fundraising.



# Conclusion

Several factors can contribute to the success of collaborative relationships between public television stations and science museums. It is essential the organizations consider these important factors not only when embarking on partnerships, but throughout the terms of a project as well. Understanding each partner's unique assets is essential for building the solid and lasting foundation for successful collaborations. A true partnership between a public television station and a science museum can provide both organizations with shared audiences, shared resources, and opportunities for collaboration for years to come.

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Associate Producer: Stephanie Carter  
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Project Manager: Julie Schapiro Thorman  
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Associate Producer: Maggie Villiger  
Series Director: Larry Engel

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Director: Barbara N. Flagg, Ed.D

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### Partner Public Television Stations and Museums

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