



The Association of Polar Early Career Scientists: Gaining the leadership experience

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The Fourth International Polar Year (IPY 2007-2008) brought together scientists from a different variety of research fields to collaborate on 228 endorsed projects in both the Arctic and Antarctic during a two-year period. All these projects help to advance our fundamental understanding of the Polar Regions and the cryosphere as a whole. But now, at the end of International Polar Year we face the most important issue - how to ensure the continuum of polar research. Looking back, we need to learn our lessons from the past IPY's and secure the legacy of the scientific advances at present.

To ensure this legacy, the next generation of polar scientists must be recruited, nurtured, educated, and mentored. Thus, professional development and networking activities must be expanded to address difficulties in international and interdisciplinary collaborations, rapidly developing technologies, logistical requirements of fieldwork, and the increasing need to disseminate science results to the public and policy makers.

One of the major legacies of the IPY was the creation of the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS), which now is recognized as “an outstanding success of the International Polar Year 2007-2008”. Founded in 2006 by and for young scientists to facilitate opportunities, to share ideas and experiences and to develop new research initiatives and collaborations, APECS now is more than 3500 early career polar researchers (undergraduate and graduate students, PhD students and postdoctoral researchers, early faculty members, educators and everyone with interests in Polar regions and the wider cryosphere) from more than 75 countries.

APECS aims to stimulate interdisciplinary and international research collaborations, and to develop effective future leaders in polar research, education and outreach. The key aim of the association is to raise the profile of polar research by providing a continuum of leadership.

We all recognise that the “soft skills” such as communicating with the media, influencing policy, fund raising and project management usually do not form a part of the graduate's training. APECS helps to equip young researchers with these kind of skills through diverse activities including: panel discussions; career development workshops at conferences already being attended by established polar researchers; webinars; comprehensive online resources; formal mentoring; online activities and many more.

Due to APECS' inherently international nature, the APECS website hosts many initiatives to provide information and resources to early-career scientists, as well as to facilitate discussion and interactions between polar researchers from all disciplines. Furthermore, education and outreach activities are promoted to stimulate the next generation of polar researchers.

All these initiatives not only serve as ways to develop the research, they also serve to provide leadership training to the many individuals who plan these activities and creates a strong sense of community across disciplinary and national borders.

What is critically important is to create a strong community of early career and senior researchers helping and motivating each other to improve and stay connected to research.

Since its inception, APECS has strived to develop the partnerships with international organizations and scientific bodies. APECS has been recognized by the IPY sponsors, the International Council of Science (ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), as the organization that, together with other partners (e.g., International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR)), will carry forward the momentum of polar research, education and outreach in the years to come.

In a period when the Polar Regions are experiencing rapid environmental, social and geopolitical changes, we need to fully understand global connections and impacts. All these will require innovative, international and interdisciplinary approaches. To work effectively within and cross-disciplines, as well as outside the scientific community will be essential to address the changes through science-based policy and a well informed public. That is why stimulating, nurturing and training the future effective leaders of polar science is crucial.

We are sure that the lessons learned by APECS will be valuable to other early career initiatives in many disciplines and countries.

To learn more about the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) please visit www.apecs.is or contact info@apecs.is.