

Tapping Into the Success of Science on Tap New River Valley: Lessons Learned from Eight Years of a Community-Centered Science Outreach Program

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Abstract

Communicating scientific research to the public through outreach faces many challenges, including impediments to designing and implementing sustainable outreach programming as well as communication challenges between scientists and audience. Here, we present Science on Tap New River Valley (NRV), a community-centered monthly science outreach program designed to reduce barriers to effective science outreach and share research with residents of the New River Valley in Virginia. The program places special emphasis on interactivity with community members and provides support for speakers to ensure that this goal is met. With a relatively small budget and a primarily graduate student-led volunteer organizing team, Science on Tap NRV serves as a model of a sustainable outreach program that provides opportunities for community members to engage with scientists, researchers to build and practice their science communication skills, and graduate students to learn to coordinate and implement effective outreach events. We share the details of the factors that have contributed to the success of Science on Tap NRV since 2017.

Background and Introduction

Science outreach programming is one mode of facilitating the transfer of research results into public knowledge and is fundamentally intended to serve the public by disseminating scientific knowledge in an easily understandable format and by providing public access to researchers. In an era of mis- and disinformation that spreads rapidly via social media, in-person engagement with scientists is increasingly important (Ishizumi et al., 2024; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2025). Participants at science outreach events report increased curiosity, understanding, and trust in science (Jensen & Buckley, 2014; Rouzer et al., 2023). Outreach events can inspire participants to explore topics further, motivate young attendees to consider careers in science, and, ideally, are enjoyable for participants (Jensen & Buckley, 2014; Clark et al., 2016).

From the scientist's perspective, science outreach can create a sense of personal fulfillment and foster the development of various professional skills. Those conducting science outreach report feeling increased confidence and excitement about their research, which may be especially empowering for students or early-career scientists (Block et al., 2016). Like participants, presenters cite having

fun as an important outcome (Jensen & Buckley, 2014). Outreach programming contributes to scientists' professional development by building teaching experience, increasing understanding of research topics, sparking new inspiration, providing new perspectives, and even boosting academic productivity (Jensen et al., 2008; Bubela et al., 2009; Devonshire & Hathway, 2014; Block et al., 2016; Clark et al., 2016; Rouzer et al., 2023). Additionally, participating in outreach activities can fulfill scientists' perceived moral responsibility, and sometimes legal obligation, to share outputs of sponsored research (e.g., Mathews et al., 2005; Ecklund et al., 2012; Nelson, 2022).

Scientists encounter many challenges when creating or participating in science outreach events. Traditional academic structures hinder the prioritization of outreach through barriers that include perceptions of lower academic productivity, lack of consideration for outreach activities during the tenure process, and/or lack of respect from peers or superiors (Ecklund et al., 2012; Devonshire & Hathway, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Carpenter, 2015; Fuentes-del-Burgo et al., 2023; Rouzer et al., 2023; Beasley-Hall et al., 2024). Additional barriers include time constraints—especially at large or teaching-focused institutions—and lack of

training, support, and/or funding (Andrews et al., 2005; Ecklund et al., 2012; Woitowich et al., 2022; Fuentes-del-Burgo et al., 2023; Luecke et al., 2023). Some scientists also report inadequate preparation or lack of knowledge about communication strategies as reasons for not engaging in science outreach (Ecklund et al., 2012; Rouzer et al., 2023).

Poor logistics, inadequate advertising, and failure to address audience needs can hinder programs' success (Andrews et al., 2005). Specific examples include inaccessible materials, topics irrelevant to the audience's daily life, or cultural disconnects between topic and audience (Bubela et al., 2009; Sandu & Christenson, 2011; Block et al., 2016). Programs lacking a cohesive and engaging story may struggle to maintain audience interest (e.g., Martinez-Conde and Macknik, 2017; Tirumalai, 2024).

Effective science outreach programs use storytelling, bidirectional communication, and informal settings to engage audiences and sustain interest. Science Cafés, introduced in the late 1990s, facilitate informal dialogue between scientists and the public (Nielsen et al., 2015; Ocobock & Hawley, 2020). They typically feature a single researcher presenting their work or a panel discussing broader scientific themes (Nielsen et al., 2015).

As Science Cafés spread globally, "Science on Tap" events emerged as a popular variation, harnessing the social setting of pubs and bars to make science more engaging (Ocobock & Hawley, 2020). Both models have been adapted to different cultural contexts. In Europe, events have been held in gardens, museums, and libraries, often involving the community in selecting relevant topics. The BigPicnic project used botanic gardens to discuss food sovereignty and sustainability (Kapelari et al., 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual Science Cafés were implemented in Italy, allowing experts to connect with audiences online and expand their viewership while preserving the interactive and informal nature of the events (Pacini et al., 2020). In the United States, the Café Scientifique model inspired Teen Science Cafés, where high school students engage with scientists and explore STEM careers through hands-on activities (National Science Teachers Association, 2016).

Despite their success, Science Cafés and Science on Tap programs face challenges. They often struggle to attract a broad audience beyond those already interested in science, i.e., "preaching to the choir" (Ocobock & Hawley, 2020). In the United States, Science on Tap events often draw

attendees who already have a positive view of science, indicating a need for strategies to engage more diverse and skeptical audiences (Ocobock & Hawley, 2020). Participants of Science Cafés have noted that the creation of programming solely by scientists can enable events to slip back into lecture format and/or de-center the audience's needs (Nielsen et al., 2015). Programming that intentionally centers audience needs and experience aligns with the participation and engagement paradigm of science communication proposed by Druckman et al. (2025), which is well-positioned to counter the denigration of science in the public sphere.

This article presents Science on Tap New River Valley (NRV), a free science outreach event series that centers interaction with the audience and breaks down boundaries between audience and expert. Events are hosted monthly at a family-owned brewery in the New River Valley, Virginia, in the United States. We—the past and current organizers—share the principles and practices that have made our program successful. For us, success includes a consistent audience size (mode of 40) that includes both "regulars" and newcomers, speakers who are eager to work with us, audience questions at the end of each event, graduate student organizers who are committed to seeing the program continue, and an amicable relationship with our event venue. While general "how to" guides are available (National Informal STEM Education Network, n.d.; American Chemical Society, n.d.; Sigma Xi, n.d.; WGBH Educational Foundation, n.d.), this paper includes extensive detail and audience-centered approaches that shift outreach from only information dissemination to participation and engagement (Druckman et al., 2025). Our eight years of continuous programming provide lessons that have garnered attention within the science communication community (DeNunzio & Hagen, 2025; Kroehler et al., 2025; Goh et al., 2025). Here, we share specific elements that make our program a success so that other scientists and organizations can use and adapt our lessons for their own science café-style events.

Program Description

The Science on Tap NRV Concept

Science on Tap NRV events are monthly (excluding May and December) informal science presentations at Rising Silo Brewery in Blacksburg, Virginia. At each hour-long event, one or multiple people share their expertise. Speakers are often affiliated with the local university, Virginia

Tech (VT), but we welcome expertise from any background, regardless of affiliation, academic credentials, or professional status, as we believe expertise manifests in many forms. While the event follows a general structure, we remain flexible to adapt communication and engagement strategies for each topic. Common elements include:

- The event is always open to the public and free of charge.
- Speakers are encouraged to share a personal narrative and explain how their identities intersect with science, i.e., their “scientist origin story.”
- Speakers are not permitted to use a slideshow during their presentation.
- Event organizers work with speakers to plan one or more audience engagement activities (Table 1).
- A substantial question-and-answer period occurs towards the end of the event—at least fifteen minutes and often longer.

Equally important is the preparation that occurs prior to events (Figure 1). Members of the organizing committee—which includes graduate students, faculty, and, initially, two science communication professionals—work with speakers to develop the event structure and design audience engagement activities. During these sessions, we provide the speaker with strategies to reach our audience and describe activities that have worked in the past (Table 1). We also brainstorm with speakers about how to present outside of a traditional lecture format, in accordance with Science on Tap NRV’s no-slideshow policy, one of our mechanisms for developing creative, audience-centered events. We encourage speakers to have

fun and present as if they are sharing their work with friends.

Organizing team members rotate speaker coaching responsibilities, with each member coaching 2–3 speakers per year. Senior members mentor and collaborate with newer members through 1–2 coaching sessions, with graduate student team members typically leading the process. Speakers have been eager to engage and value the team’s science communication expertise.

Organizational Structure

Implementing science outreach programming requires consideration of venue, budget, event promotion, and leadership. In this section, we outline the facets of organizing Science on Tap NRV.

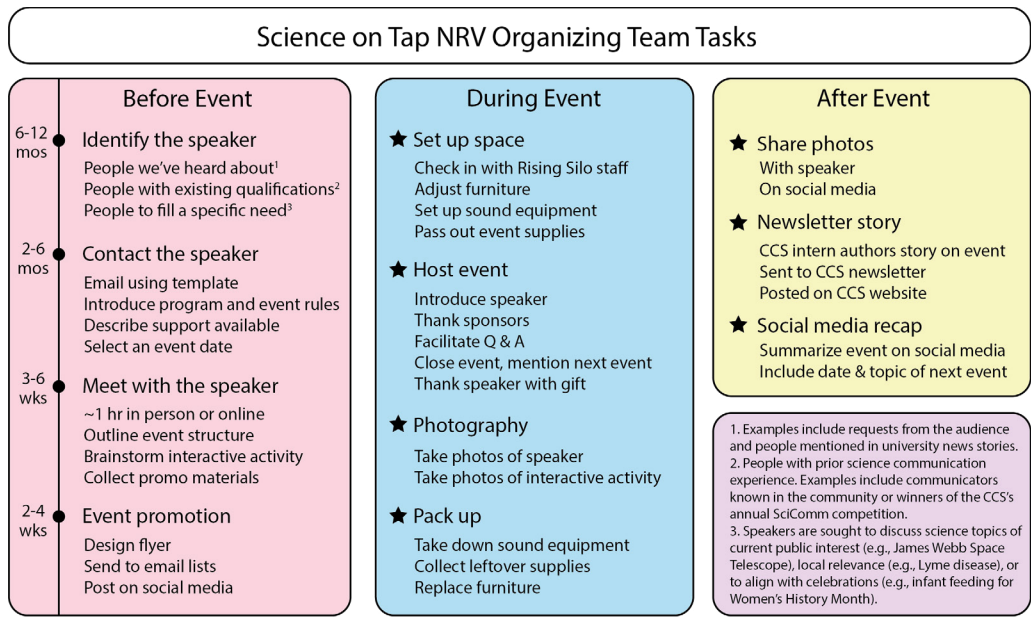
Institutional Support

Science on Tap NRV began in 2017 as a collaboration between a local science writer, two faculty of VT’s Center for Communicating Science (CCS), and the then-president of the local Sigma Xi Research Honor Society chapter. Science on Tap NRV benefits from institutional support from the CCS, for which helping researchers develop communication skills is a mission, and VT’s chapter of Sigma Xi, an international scientific research honor society with a commitment to the public understanding of science. The CCS provides a small, regular financial contribution in the form of speaker gifts, a sound system, and occasional additional funding on a case-by-case basis. CCS student interns or graduate assistants often handle event promotion and extend the reach of events through follow-up stories in the CCS newsletter and social media (Figure 1). The VT

Table 1. Categories of Audience Engagement Activities and Examples from Science on Tap NRV

Demonstrations or Show-and-Tell	Games Tailored to Speaker Topic	Hands-On Science
Seed a mushroom log	Drawing contest of the James Webb Space Telescope	Model airplane building and flying contest
Meet-and-greet with hermit crabs at different stages of life cycle	Water quality bingo	Determining the origin of rock specimens
Hellbender salamander breeding boxes and babies	Trivia on COVID-19 transmission modes	Bird watching walk around Rising Silo Brewery

Figure 1. Tasks Involved in Planning and Implementing Science on Tap NRV Events



Sigma Xi chapter has provided banking services and occasional funding for collaborative special events. Science on Tap NRV is an ongoing project supported by CCS and Sigma Xi, rather than a standalone organization.

Both organizations offer crucial guidance and connections. Faculty mentor the organizing committee, connect with university researchers, promote events, and recruit graduate student volunteers to serve on the organizing team. Institutional support has been especially valuable in expanding the organizing team, which has grown from just a few people to up to eight graduate students, faculty, and community members. With a larger team, each volunteer's time commitment stays under 3–4 hours per month.

Organizing Team

Planning and implementing Science on Tap NRV events takes a dedicated and diverse organizing team. The team has included 14 individuals since 2017: two long-term core members (Carolyn Kroehler: 8 years, K.L. Burke: 6 years), five VT faculty and staff with periodic involvement (Douglas Pfeiffer, Deborah Good, Patricia Raun, Elizabeth Allen, Cassandra Hockman), and eight graduate students (Amy Hagen, Maria DeNunzio, Susan Chen, Ying-Xian Goh, Esther Oyedele, Prescott Vayda, Nicole Bracci, Mika Pagani). In 2025, we added three new graduate student members who are not authors. Core members, whose participation fits with their organizations' missions, ensure continuity when

students rotate in and out.

Graduate students are often recruited to the organizing team after taking VT's Communicating Science course (taught by Carolyn Kroehler and Patricia Raun) and are interested in science communication, public outreach, event planning, and community engagement. Practicing community engagement and outreach can be difficult during graduate education, and Science on Tap NRV provides a unique opportunity for graduate students to train and consider how to amplify science beyond academic dissemination. It is worth noting that most of the organizing team members are not professional science communicators. Similarly, none of the speakers have been professional science communicators.

Responsibilities of the organizing team include recruiting, liaising with, and coaching speakers, developing a plan for events, designing advertising materials, promoting events, offering support for games or other interactive activities, hosting the event itself, managing audio and/or video equipment, curating the email list, and tracking the budget and donations (Figure 1). We share many of these responsibilities on a rotating basis, with a different member taking the lead on each month's event. The team shares a Google Drive folder with invitation and promotion templates and guides for event design and implementation.

Venue Partnership

We partner with Rising Silo Brewery in

Blacksburg, VA, to host our monthly Science on Tap NRV events. Rising Silo is a respected local restaurant and brewery with a casual, family-friendly atmosphere connected to agriculture and the outdoors. Many of our events feature science concepts relevant to families and/or the outdoors, making Rising Silo an excellent backdrop. Rising Silo provides the event space for free, with perks like free drinks for the speaker and host as well as free merchandise for game prizes. Our events bring new customers to Rising Silo, and the venue's regular customers often join our events, creating a mutually beneficial relationship. Rising Silo welcomes Science on Tap attendees regardless of their intention to purchase from the brewery, and while introducing and closing the event we encourage tipping of staff. We view Rising Silo as essential to our success and recommend that similar programs seek venues that offer comparable benefits.

The location and event space at Rising Silo are logistically favorable for Science on Tap NRV. Blacksburg is a small town with ~45,000 local residents and ~38,000 students. The venue is located just outside of downtown, with ample parking and bike accessibility. The distance from town allows Rising Silo and therefore Science on Tap NRV events to be community-focused rather than student-centric. Rising Silo offers both indoor and outdoor event spaces that satisfy requirements such as an open area for our speaker, power for our sound system, and audience seating. This flexibility allows us to host each event in a space most suited to its topic (e.g., natural science events can be hosted outside). Both the indoor and outdoor event spaces are comfortable and accessible. Speakers can bring items that may otherwise have restrictions, such as live reptiles or a groundwater flow model containing a large volume of liquid. Rising Silo's layout allows the event to be visible to venue visitors while respecting the privacy of those who prefer their own space. This setup encourages casual engagement from passersby, unlike separate event rooms or crowded, noisy venues. The large farm property offers opportunities for outdoor activities, such as nature sketching and photography.

Budget

Costs associated with Science on Tap NRV events are listed in Table 2. During rare special events, such as inviting a guest speaker from out of town or partnering with another organization to provide a larger event, extra costs are covered

by VT's CCS and Sigma Xi. This support and our no-charge venue allow us to offer all events free and open to the public, a priority for inclusive outreach. Our monthly Science on Tap NRV events incur low costs, some of which may not be needed for other programs.

Event Promotion

For each event, in collaboration with the speaker, an organizer creates a title, short description, and flyer. Our promotion strategies are designed to reach the broader NRV community and the campus community at VT (Figure 1) and include a local event blog, newspapers, online events pages, and a parenting website. We share events on social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Our institutional partners amplify events through their social media accounts, websites, and email lists. We maintain our own email list, which audience members sign up for, and send information to six different VT lists. Speakers share the event through their own networks, and their friends and colleagues often attend Science on Tap NRV and become repeat attendees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we aired our events on YouTube live, reaching people well beyond our local community.

Speakers

Diverse Topics

Our events are designed to engage a broad audience by offering an array of topics. We actively seek topics beyond our personal interests and do not dismiss topics for not being "scientific enough." We feel that it is important to recognize the diversity of what science is and how it manifests in everyday life. Our past events have spanned various disciplines (Figure 2), with examples such as frog microbiomes, groundwater, sketching in nature, respiratory health in coal mining communities, science poetry, and the science of farts. Our goal is not to disseminate any particular knowledge or persuade audience members to adopt a particular perspective, but rather to provide a forum for community building and exchange of information.

Diversity of Roles and Experience

Across 71 events from April 2017 through August 2024, we hosted 132 total speakers: 89 affiliated with VT and 43 representing other organizations. Speakers have represented each of the colleges within VT, interdisciplinary spaces, and community-based organizations (Figure 3). Those affiliated with VT include graduate students, faculty, and other employees.

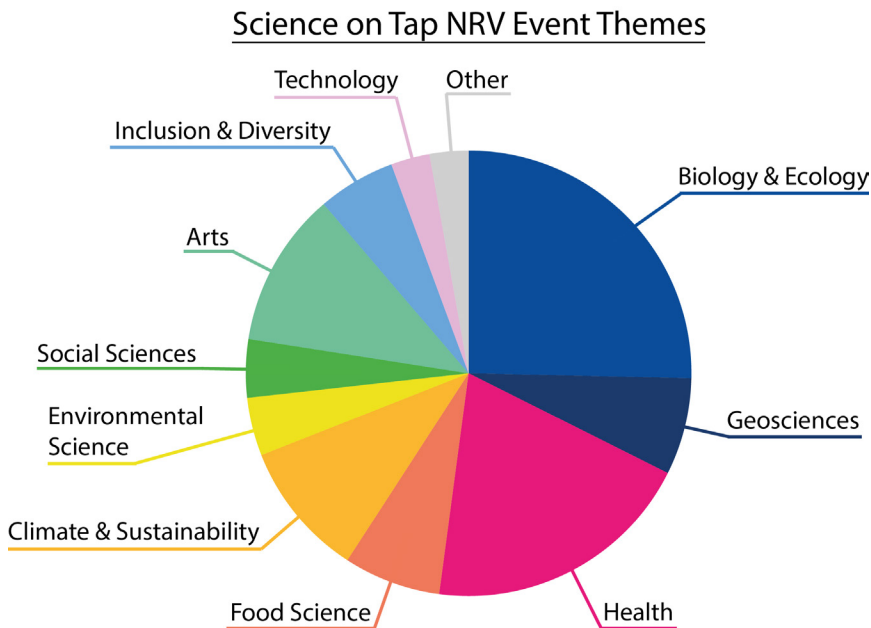
Community-based presenters include growers/farmers, local journalists, government officials, mental health professionals, business consultants, and artists. Many events (n = 31) have featured multiple speakers with different affiliations and/or experience levels. For example, the March 2024

event featured a lactation consultant, pediatric nurse practitioner, neuroscientist, and policy researcher discussing infant feeding. In July 2021, we hosted a fish biologist and a local artist for an event on stream biology and provided materials for attendees to paint the streamscape

Table 2. Cost Breakdown for Science on Tap NRV Events

Category	Item	Cost	Funding Source
Sound system	Speakers/ sound system	\$800	CCS
	Speaker stands	\$179.98	
	Wireless microphones	\$457	
	Cables	\$79.43	
Event supplies	Art supplies/trivia or game prizes	Varies (\$0–20 per event)	Donations
Speaker gifts	Beaker mug	\$10.73 each	CCS

Figure 2. Distribution of Science on Tap NRV Event Topics



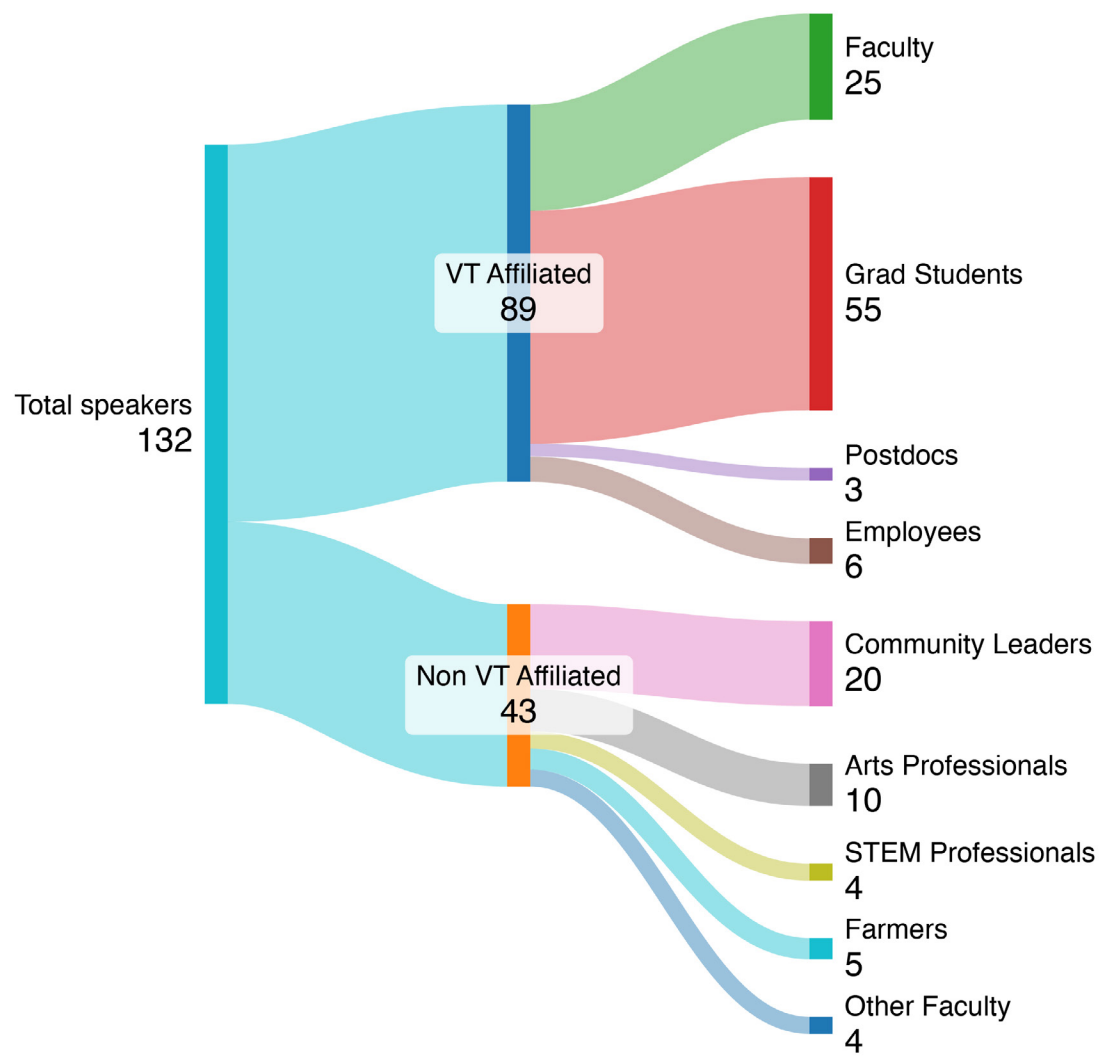
Note. For the sake of simplicity, each event was given only one theme. See Table S1 for full events list and Table S2 for definition of terms in the data repository link on page 12.

next to Rising Silo.

Featuring a diverse array of speakers from different occupations, affiliations, and experience levels allows our events to expand notions of who does science and what scientists look like. Speakers may be people without academic degrees who use science in their careers, or researchers not affiliated with a university. We actively invite speakers from

many different experience levels, occupations, ages, races, genders, and physical appearances to showcase the diversity of people who are and can become scientists. Tracking event data (dates, presentation titles, number of presenters, presenter job titles and affiliations, and in-person and online attendance; see Table S1 in the data repository link on page 12.) throughout the life of Science on Tap

Figure 3. Proportions of Science on Tap NRV Speakers Affiliated and Not Affiliated with Virginia Tech (VT), with Further Breakdown Into Specific Positions



Note. See Table S3 in the data repository link on page 12.

NRV has been useful for reflecting on past events and planning for the future.

Support for Speakers

Members of our organizing team provide as much one-on-one support for event speakers as needed. Sometimes speakers have a good idea of how their event will go; other times brainstorming is needed to flesh out the event structure, including how the audience will interact with the speaker. Designing the interactive activity is often a challenge for speakers, and the organizing team can recommend successful activities from past Science on Tap NRV events (Table 1). For example, one event included a dog training session; the speaker and audience members brought their dogs to illustrate principles of dog behavior. A few speakers have used singing to engage the audience, while others have used movement and dance. Drawing and painting are popular interactive mediums—several event speakers have prompted the audience to illustrate their vision of a scientific concept. When event topics involve visual or tactile analysis of physical specimens, speakers frequently bring in live animals, fossils, rocks, or plants. Trivia and bingo are popular activities that can be tailored to any topic.

Outcomes and Impacts for the Science on Tap NRV Community

Audience Impact

Our audience is a mix of “regulars” who attend frequently no matter the topic, people who are drawn to particular events because of the specific speaker or topic, and “accidentals”—people who come to the venue for other reasons but find themselves interested in the event. This latter category places Science on Tap NRV within Science in Vivo’s “situated engagement” framework, especially when the presenter stays to have dinner after the event and continues talking with Rising Silo patrons—both “going where the people go” and “doing what the people do” (Science in Vivo, n.d.). Our audience has included diverse ages and backgrounds, with some topics drawing families and children and others attracting members of local interest groups. The games, demonstrations, and hands-on activities (Table 1) at our events are often suitable for children. Most audience members are from the local community, including VT students and employees, with occasional visitors traveling more than an hour for an event.

From our first event, we have regularly filled our venue’s space, suggesting that Science on Tap NRV is serving a real need in our area. Average

attendance is around 50, with a low of 12 and a high of 101 for normal, in-person events (Figure 4). Attendance has remained consistent throughout the lifetime of Science on Tap NRV, with a mode of 40 and a median of 44.

Events were held in an online format from April 2020 through June 2021 in response to COVID-19. Because online events increased accessibility for some audience members, we continued to provide a virtual option after returning to in-person events in July 2021. The VT library provided cameras, tripods, and microphones to livestream four events. We discontinued hosting live streams because of the volunteer time required, the unpredictability of equipment availability, and the small online audience size. Instead, we prioritized the in-person, interactive components of our events and allocated volunteer time and funding to high-quality in-person events.

A total of 4,396 people have attended Science on Tap NRV from our first event in 2017 through September 19, 2024. This includes 2,679 in-person attendees and 1,717 virtual attendees. These numbers include repeat attendees, but the fact that we have both repeat and new audience members at each event is a measure of impact. Audience members who frequently attend reflect the success of our program and include Blacksburg town officials, retired schoolteachers, young families, and others. The presence of new audience members shows a continuing appetite in the community for learning about science and engaging with scientists. Our observations suggest that an important audience benefit is the opportunity to interact directly with scientists in an informal way, where individual questions can be addressed. Both the event structure and venue space encourage social interaction and connection, with events designed to break down barriers between scientists and the public while humanizing scientists by allowing them to share personal narratives. The success of these strategies is reflected in lively question-and-answer sessions that often continue after the official end of the event. Attendees at a talk about Lyme disease asked specific questions about diagnosis and treatment. At a geology event, an audience member brought rock samples from their property to be identified by the speaker. We have never hosted an event that drew no attendees or failed to elicit questions from the audience and participation in planned activities.

Speaker Impact

Conversations with speakers suggest that they

appreciate the opportunity to share their work in an informal setting, to be challenged by our “no PowerPoint” policy, to be supported by our pre-event coaching sessions, and to experiment with new ideas. One speaker told us that his presentation at Science on Tap NRV led to further development of his ideas and a publication. Three graduate student speakers told us that they were trying out their audience engagement activity for the first time, having created it for their Science on Tap NRV presentation, and were planning to use it in their teaching if it proved successful. At the request of graduate student groups, we have hosted several “research showcase” events featuring multiple speakers with a unifying theme. Plans for a Science on Tap NRV presentation have been incorporated by faculty members into grant proposal broader impacts.

Graduate Student Organizer Impacts

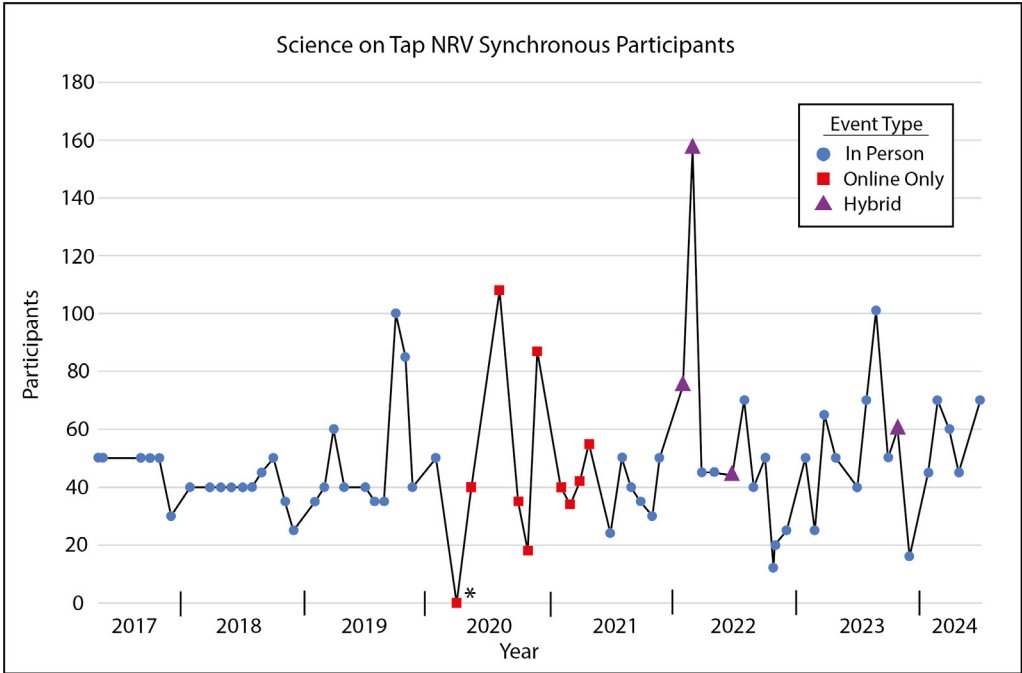
Author Susan Chen compiled statements from six graduate student organizers past and present (all authors of this paper) about how their involvement has contributed to professional development. Organizers shared strong positive opinions of their experiences with Science on Tap NRV and stated that the skills in creative thinking

and speaker coaching were a unique addition to their graduate training. One former organizer said:

Working with Science on Tap NRV was an exciting challenge for me to practice how we can translate technical concepts into relevant information for the public in an approachable way. I found huge value in coaching speakers outside of my own field and thinking about how I wanted to learn from them as a layperson, and using my science communicator side to craft an engaging event. My involvement absolutely opened doors for post-PhD jobs. Across academia and industry, employers loved that I had a toolkit to interface with a range of people and translate science into digestible packages.

Organizers also reported skill development in teamwork, flexibility, adaptation to diverse communication styles, conveying respect for expertise in many forms, and reception of feedback. Working across fields on the organizing team and with speakers expanded organizers’ networks and receptiveness to a range of communication styles. Carolyn Kroehler has served as a professional

Figure 4. Science on Tap NRV Event Attendance



Note. Synchronous attendance at each event, April 2017 to June 2024, with colors denoting event types. Events are labeled with their date (see Table S1 in the data repository link on page 12 for information on their topic). Note that the event on 4/4/20 was fully asynchronous and thus has zero synchronous views.

reference for at least six graduate student organizers and informally mentored every member of the team since 2017. Creating and maintaining a positive and inclusive learning environment for the Science on Tap NRV community improved organizers' confidence in managing academic classrooms. One former organizer, now faculty at another institution, reported that skills learned through Science on Tap NRV helped them more effectively teach non-major classes because they were able to communicate complex topics in an understandable way.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Throughout the eight years that Science on Tap NRV has been operating, we have found the events to be consistently engaging for the audience, rewarding for the organizing team, profitable for the venue, and enjoyable for the speakers. We attribute the program's success to the following characteristics and recommend them to other science outreach programs:

- **Topics are diverse and are presented by diverse speakers with various experiences, and speakers are supported through pre-event coaching.** There is no pressure for our speakers to have a certain academic degree or to conform to "traditional" forms of science, and we provide science communication strategies in preparation for their event. We find that this engages a larger audience, contributes to the program's longevity, and showcases the diversity of science and scientists.
- **We emphasize interactivity and approachability,** avoiding traditional academic methods of presentation in favor of more engaging and accessible formats. When the ice is broken with an expert through warm-up activities, audience members are empowered to ask questions and raise points they might not otherwise voice, fostering a deeper discussion and a more productive identification of our community's interests and concerns.
- **Our location is family-friendly and adaptable** to many types of presentations. Events are mutually beneficial for Science on Tap NRV and the host venue.
- **Our organizing team is diverse and well supported.** Its size allows a manageable time commitment for each member. New members are provided mentorship before older members rotate off. Email

templates and other documents facilitate task completion. Our diversity manifests in professional roles and background, social-demographic factors, and communication skills. There are no prerequisites to join the team beyond a passion for science communication, and membership on the team provides opportunities for professional development and networking. Human and financial resource support from the CCS provides continuity.

Every program has room for improvement. Our priorities center around moving toward the co-creation of programming, building on participatory research and evaluation principles (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Detroit Urban Research Center, 2011; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011) and the recent recommendations within the field of science communication to move beyond information dissemination into shared decision-making (Druckman et al., 2025). In the past, we have used surveys, a suggestion box, and social media polls to solicit feedback on audience needs and to generate topic ideas. Now, we are exploring partnerships with evaluators and researchers through VT's Center for Educational Networks and Impacts affiliates program to leverage their expertise and meet our priorities. In developing a research and evaluation collaboration, we are specifically interested in:

- Developing fun and playful ways to solicit and incorporate audience feedback through participatory evaluation approaches.
- Identifying and overcoming barriers to attendance.
- Moving towards program co-creation by implementing an ongoing mechanism for audience participation in topic and speaker selection.
- Investigating more formally the impact of participation in Science on Tap NRV on speakers and organizers.

We hope that by strengthening our program in these key areas, we can maintain and expand the impact of Science on Tap NRV for years to come.

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Data and tables supporting this manuscript are available on the Virginia Tech Data Repository at <https://doi.org/10.7294/31544950>.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Ethics

Ethics approval was not required for the research contained in this manuscript.

Author Contributions

Amy Hagen assisted with planning and implementation of Science on Tap NRV events, conceptualized the manuscript, coordinated writing efforts, wrote a large portion of the manuscript, conducted data analysis and visualization, and finalized edits. Maria DeNunzio and Carolyn Kroehler assisted with planning and implementation of Science on Tap NRV events, wrote large portions of the manuscript, and finalized edits. Carolyn Kroehler is one of the founding organizers of the project. Susan Chen, Ying-Xian Goh, and Esther Oyedele assisted with planning and implementation of Science on Tap NRV events, wrote portions of the manuscript, and helped with edits. K.L. Burke, Cassandra Hockman, Prescott Vayda, Mika Pagani, Deborah Good, and Nicole Bracci assisted with planning and implementation of Science on Tap NRV events and provided edits on the manuscript. K.L. Burke and Deborah Good are founding organizers of the project. Douglas Pfeiffer assisted with planning and implementation of Science on Tap NRV events. Elizabeth Allen manages Virginia Tech's Center for Communicating Science events database and tracks Science on Tap NRV speaker and participant data. Patricia Raun is the founding director of Virginia Tech's Center for Communicating Science (CCS) and one of the founding organizers of Science on Tap NRV events. She has assisted with planning and implementation of events, and the CCS has provided institutional support for the project across its lifespan.

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