

## Life in transition: ASLO and early career scientists

By:

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In between graduate school and permanent job placement is a critical early career period, which serves as a foundation of future professional success. During this period, young scientists often face uncertain job security, frequent geographic relocation, and countless other transitions. Although stressful, this period is full of opportunity, reflection, and tremendous personal and professional development. How can early career scientists successfully navigate this critical transitional period to build a successful career?

Early career positions often provide both intellectually stimulating and productive opportunities. However, there are many obstacles that early career scientists also face, such as the imposter syndrome (Laursen 2008; Woolston 2016), metaphorically “leaky pipes” (Mervis 2012; Else 2018), the historically low rate at which PhDs obtain tenure track jobs (Hansen et al. 2014), family planning challenges (Raper 2017), and poor mental health support (Pain 2017; Evans et al. 2018). Whether it is the daily struggle of work-life balance issues, finding and obtaining grant funding, weighing options among academic, industry, government, not-for-profit, or other professional opportunities, or just trying to get a paper published, early career scientists should know there are supportive scientific organizations and individuals. Hence, they are not alone. And often, a sense of community and shared understanding are just what are needed to make the early career period a successful, meaningful, and happy one!

How does ASLO support early career scientists, understanding full well the challenges they face and the uncertainties that lie ahead? Like for most complex challenges, there is often no single solution. But, ASLO and its members can do several things, such as providing training, mentoring and networking opportunities, listening, and supporting a sense of community.

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ALSO's Early Career Committee addresses the challenges and opportunities of being an early career scientist and ASLO member. It also feeds back the changing needs of early career scientists to the broader Association membership. ASLO defines early career scientists as those who have completed their terminal degree within the last 10 years. Early career members currently make up about 20% of ASLO's membership, and when combined with student members, these groups make up roughly half of the Association. Through diversity in areas such as gender, geography, and career type, the Early Career Committee seeks to represent ASLO as a whole. This is particularly important as requirements for support may differ substantially among early career ASLO members depending on their personal and professional circumstances.

At ASLO meetings, the Early Career Committee hosts events such as evening mixers and lunchtime panels with leading scientists, editors, and funding agency program officers. For example, in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2016 the Early Career Committee hosted a panel workshop with US National Science Foundation program officers, and in 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia the committee hosted a panel workshop with editors of major disciplinary journals (Figure 1). The goals of these lunchtime panels have been to enable early career scientists to better understand the process of science, how they can contribute, and what renders a manuscript, review, or grant submission successful. These events support professional networking among early career scientists and with more established scientists. The Early Career Committee also hosts evening social events at ASLO meetings to further support networking. When the community's spirit is strong, individuals are better poised for success.

Serving on ASLO's Early Career Committee is a unique opportunity to contribute to the success of ASLO's early career members and the Association more broadly. The benefits of active participation in ASLO's EC committee can be substantial. For example, Chris Filstrup, who is rotating off of the Committee at the end of 2018 remarked, "ASLO was instrumental to my professional development as a student and continues to be now as an early career member, whether it is through travel awards, networking opportunities, workshops at meetings, and programs such as Eco-DAS. Personally, I find it very rewarding to serve our Association, and the Early Career Committee offers a wonderful opportunity to do so as an early career member."

Similarly, Early Career Committee member Kateri Salk remarked, "As early career scientists, we often feel like the 'tweeners,' with different needs than students and established ASLO members. Early Career events and resources provide the opportunity to more strategically achieve our goals, whether it's navigating the job market, more effectively engaging in the scholarship of our field, or participating in fellowship with other early career scientists. Serving on the Early Career Committee allows me to engage more deeply with these activities. I've particularly enjoyed meeting new people and providing this service to the L&O community, both of which are benefits to myself as well!"

Participating in ASLO's early career activities or serving on the Early Career Committee can bring other benefits, too, in terms of personal and professional networking. "One of my favorite aspects of serving on the Early Career Committee is helping to organize and attend the mixers to facilitate networking at ASLO meetings. It is invigorating to meet new people and share ideas," says committee member Kevin Rose. "At mixers when I approach groups of what seemingly appear to be longtime friends, the most common response to my question about how they know each other is that they met five minutes ago at the mixer."

If you are an early career scientist and want to engage more actively in ASLO and contribute to new or ongoing activities, this is the perfect time to join. The Early Career Committee is continually on the lookout for new members and ideas, and soon there will be several openings on the Early Career Committee. In addition to planning upcoming meeting events, the Committee is currently planning revisions to ASLO's Early Career webpage and associated resources, and obtaining funding for future workshops and other professional development opportunities. Even if you don't want to serve on the Committee, new ideas are always welcome. If you are interested in volunteering or have ideas to improve early career resources or activities, please reach out to [career@lists.aslo.org](mailto:career@lists.aslo.org) or email one of the current committee members individually. Current members and contact details are listed at <https://aslo.org/page/early-career>). The community of early career scientists grows stronger when its members are active. So please, reach out, let us know your thoughts. Help us build and shape a bright future for all of ASLO, together!

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## Figures



Figure 1. The Early Career Committee's lunchtime panel at the ASLO meeting in Victoria, British Columbia in 2018 hosted a panel of journal editors who discussed elements of successful manuscripts and reviews. Inset, lead editor of *Limnology and Oceanography: Letters* Dr. Patricia Soranno, presented on reviewer statistics and the essential elements of high quality reviews. Over 60 early career scientists attended the panel.