Scientists' Institute for Public Information Encyclopedia Article

Scientists' Institute for Public Information

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Scientists' Institute for Public Information

Working to bridge a gap they perceive between scientists and the media, the Scientists' Institute for Public Information (SIPI) was established in 1963 to disseminate expert information on science and technology to journalists through a variety of means.

SIPI's best-known program is the Media Resource Service (MRS), which was founded in 1980. The MRS serves as a referral service for journalists seeking information from scientists, engineers, physicians, and policymakers. The MRS maintains a database listing more than 30,000 experts who are available for and willing to comment on a variety of topics. The service is free to any media outlet. The honorary chair of the MRS advisory committee is the highly regarded newscaster Walter Cronkite. The MRS is funded by such noteworthy news organizations as CBS Inc., the Scripps Howard Foundation, Time Warner, The Washington Post Company, the Associated Press, the National Broadcasting Company, and The New York Times Company Foundation.

In addition to the MRS, SIPI operates the Videotape Referral Service (VRS), another free resource service which aids broadcast journalists in finding videotapes to accompany science- and technology-related stories. The VRS also provides a list of videotapes for an annual SIPI conference called "TV News: The Cutting Edge," a meeting of scientists, television news directors, and science reporters. The VRS also publishes a monthly newsletter featuring topical listings of story ideas and a current catalogue of available videotapes on science-related issues.

An outgrowth of the MRS, SIPI also operates the International Hot Line in connection with its Global Change program. The hotline provides assistance to journalists worldwide by referring them to scientists and environmental experts. The Global Change program holds briefings to update the media on current international scientific and environmental issues as well.

SIPI also organizes roundtable discussions, seminars, and symposia for scientists and national journalists. These programs have focused on such issues as nuclear waste disposal, military technology and budget priorities, and human gene therapy. SIPI has also developed smaller-scale versions of these programs for state and regional press associations and journalism schools.

In addition, SIPI sponsors the Defense Writers Group. This group is made up of members of the Pentagon press corps who gather to discuss views with defense experts. In addition, SIPI publishes a newsletter addressing current issues in science policy and featuring reviews of media coverage of science and technology.