

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 22, 2016

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### Scientists and Journalists Launch Effort to Improve Communication of Contentious Science

PRINCETON, N.J. — Why do so many people reject broadly accepted scientific findings? What are the psychological, behavioral, and cultural threads that tie together the fear of vaccinations with denial of climate change? And how can we apply the answers to these questions to improve the communication and understanding of science?

Leading experts in science and science communication are focusing on these issues in a two-year study recently launched by the [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) (the Academies). The committee is charged with providing specific, practical guidance to the scientific community that can further research in this field and improve communication about the most controversial scientific issues.

Chaired by Alan Leshner, PhD., CEO Emeritus of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the [committee](#) includes academic leaders and practitioners from public policy, psychology, science communication, sociology, and political science. The Rita Allen Foundation is providing leadership funding for this project and a connected project of applied research with Climate Central. Other support for the Academy study comes from the Betty and Gordon Moore Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Burroughs Wellcome Fund.

In an op-ed published today on [ScientificAmerican.com](#), Paul Hanle, PhD., President of Climate Central, describes the current relevance of this work:

America and the world have an enormous stake in assuring that the public trusts the integrity of science and scientists. Rejection of accepted science threatens our society, not only because the enterprise of scientific research has undergirded our enormous technical and material advances since the Enlightenment, but also because science is a foundation of knowledge for improving the human condition.

The Academies study and subsequent work by Climate Central builds on a body of research demonstrating that simply presenting people with facts does not persuade people of scientifically settled principles that they may reject for deeply held and complicated reasons. By untangling the role and significance of the many factors that determine personal beliefs on scientific matters—including psychological, social, cultural, contextual, political, and economic factors—the study will provide a better understanding of the factors that affect acceptance and understanding of science.

“The scientific process offers exceptional tools for finding solutions to the complex problems we face as a society,” said Elizabeth Good Christopherson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Rita Allen Foundation. “Fittingly, it can also shed light on how to overcome barriers to productive democratic engagement with science. This pioneering effort, bringing together respected scientists and communicators from across disciplines, will give all of us who care about the future of science and our society new knowledge to help us reach across divides and build understanding, leading to more productive outcomes.”

The Academies committee will publish its findings at the end of 2016. The Climate Central project will be completed in 2017.

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*[Climate Central](#) is a non-profit research and journalism organization providing authoritative, science-based information to help the public and policymakers make sound decisions about climate and energy.*

*The [Rita Allen Foundation](#) invests in transformative ideas in their earliest stages to leverage their growth and promote breakthrough solutions to significant problems. It enables early-career biomedical scholars to do pioneering research, seeds innovative approaches to fostering informed civic engagement, and develops knowledge and networks to build the effectiveness of the philanthropic sector. Throughout its work, the Foundation embraces collaboration, creativity, learning and leadership.*