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## Finding Your Science Policy Path

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By Steph Guerra

*The following is an excerpt of a blog post by STPF Executive Branch Fellow Steph Guerra, originally published at [Addgene.org](https://addgene.org) on September 22, 2020.*

“But, seriously, what even is science policy?”

I have been asked this many times throughout my short science policy career and this seemingly simple question is a moving target. There are a multitude of options for achieving success in a science policy career with many opportunities to pivot and grow along the way. That’s what makes it

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so wonderful.

The most challenging part of jumping into this career path from academia is the uncertainty of it all. Though I had spent the first few decades of my life following a very straightforward conveyor belt from high school to college to graduate school, standing at the start of a science policy career was much more circuitous and unknown. In fact, in less than two years of walking away from the bench, I have worked for seven different organizations in a variety of science policy roles including fellowships, volunteer positions, and part-time opportunities. But even through all my roles and my current work as a [AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellow \(https://www.aaas.org/programs/science-technology-policy-fellowships\)](https://www.aaas.org/programs/science-technology-policy-fellowships) (STPF) at the Veterans Health Administration, I could never get one straight answer about what science policy even is! In this article, I hope to provide a brief explainer of the who, what, where, when, why and most importantly, how, of a science policy career.

## Who does science policy?

I've intentionally started with the 'who' question because the science policy community is the best part of working in this profession. The folks who work in science policy come from a wide variety of backgrounds with technical expertise that ranges from astronomy to bioethics to chemical engineering and everything in between. Plus, there are many science policy professionals that entered the field from a more traditional policy background, learning the science part on the job. Each path to science policy is unique and this creates a rich and diverse workforce. Out of all the career spaces I explored for my post-PhD life, the science policy community is the one that was consistently welcoming. This bears repeating. Individuals that work in science policy are a treasure—they love the work and the mission so much that they will often move mountains to give advice and guidance to those that ask. Relationship building is key in science policy. Luckily, there are many mechanisms in place to ensure your effective networking—and they're more accessible than ever thanks to the virtual world that the pandemic has foisted upon us.

### Action Items:

- A simple place to look for science policy folks is [on Twitter \(https://blog.addgene.org/early-career-researcher-toolbox-social-media-for-scientists?\\_ga=2.260875525.906105323.1600694226-548670413.1600694226\)](https://blog.addgene.org/early-career-researcher-toolbox-social-media-for-scientists?_ga=2.260875525.906105323.1600694226-548670413.1600694226)—start an account and start engaging with the #scipol hashtag. Often there will be posts about virtual meet ups and happy hours that you can attend to help build relationships.
- Reach out to a science policy professional over Twitter or LinkedIn to learn more about their career trajectory. If there's one thing everyone loves, it's talking about themselves—so don't be shy and reach out! Someone from your alumni community is a great place to start.

**To continue on the "what, where, and why" of science policy, read the rest of Dr. Guerra's blog post at <https://blog.addgene.org/finding-your-science-policy-path> (<https://blog.addgene.org/finding-your-science-policy-path>)**

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**Source URL:** <https://www.aaaspolicyfellowships.org/blog/finding-your-science-policy-path>

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**List of links present in page**

- <https://www.aaas.org/programs/science-technology-policy-fellowships>
- [https://blog.addgene.org/early-career-researcher-toolbox-social-media-for-scientists?\\_ga=2.260875525.906105323.1600694226-548670413.1600694226](https://blog.addgene.org/early-career-researcher-toolbox-social-media-for-scientists?_ga=2.260875525.906105323.1600694226-548670413.1600694226)
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