EDITORIAL

New voices, at last

Science academies are well placed to help strengthen national systems of research and innovation, drawing upon the knowledge of experienced scientists across fields. But what about the voices of early-career scientists who are impassioned to bolster international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational dialogue, with the goal of making decision-making evidence-based and inclusive? Since 2000, "young" science academies have emerged across the world. The United States has now joined this movement. In June, the U.S. National Academies launched "New Voices in Sciences, Engineering and Medicine," comprising 18 early- to mid-career scholars. They will engage in communicating the evidence base for addressing national and global challenges and help diversify the expertise in the National Academies' advisory activities (www.nationalacademies.org/newvoices). As New Voices convenes its first meeting next week, what should this organization consider?

Inspiration can be drawn from abroad. Starting in Germany, there are now some 50 nations that have a Young Academy–like institution. There are also supranational ones such as the vibrant Global Young Academy (www.globalyoungacademy.net). Scientists with disciplinary backgrounds that range from natural sciences to humanities and from medicine to engineering are selected as members on the basis of their research excellence and commitment to society. Typically, they are up to 40 years of age upon entry. Because they serve only a single 4- to 5-year term, they are incentivized to get things done, within a time frame that is feasible for academics who are under career pressure. It also allows for continual renewal of the academy.

Areas of Young Academy activity are policy-making, education, outreach, capacity building, addressing young scientists' career concerns, and promoting open science and collaboration. Examples include involvement in the European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism and the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda, the workshops on Responsible Conduct of Research in Malaysia, and contributions to gender equity and stable funding policies by the Early- and Mid-Career Researcher Forum in Australia. Young Academies' members and alumni have also developed successful cross-disciplinary Science Leadership Programmes in Africa and Southeast Asia. And they support those who face barriers in accessing academia. The Dutch, Scottish, and Global Young Academies, for example, have support programs for early-career scholars who are displaced or are refugees, in partnership with organizations such as Scholars at Risk.

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Both of us have long been involved in the Young Academy movement and consider the following elements important for a Young Academy's success: careful and transparent membership-selection processes that value diversity; a size and structure that enable the organization to think and act big, while not being so large that members may lose connection to each other and to the whole (typically 50 to 200 members, with secretarial support; the inaugural 18 members of New Voices may be a good start for further growth); and autonomy for the organization to set its own agenda.

We encourage the first members of New Voices to be bold. With so many major societal issues that call for the involvement of younger generations, New Voices could become an important stakeholder for policy-making. They can also empower other young scientists to contribute to this movement. Strong partners may furthermore be found in, for example, popular culture and media, charitable foundations, industry, and politics. New Voices will be warmly welcomed by the global network of Young Academies. It will hopefully spur the United States to become a major participant in this worldwide effort to spread the benefits of scientific developments, in their broadest sense, to all.

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