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Science in good faith: Bridging divides for democratic progress

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Abstract Deadline: Friday, May 15, 2026

Partisan polarization, left- and right-wing populism, a bi-partisan decline of trust in higher education, and an eroding social consensus more generally are exacerbating rifts at the interface between science and society. This conflict is largely not about scientific facts. Value-based divisions—some real and some perceived—between the scientific community and science-distant stakeholders undermine the ability to have constructive debates about disruptive technologies, from gene editing to artificial intelligence. These and other innovations pose ethical, societal, and policy challenges that cannot be solved by technical expertise alone. The primary obstacle is not a disagreement about scientific facts, but democratic disagreement about values. The more scientists insist that they can provide authoritative recommendations on what are, in essence, value or policy disagreements, the more their public communications will corrode public trust in science.

For this special issue, ***Science in Good Faith: Bridging Divides for Democratic Progress***, we seek papers that propose actionable pathways for restoring bidirectional dialogue between the scientific community and non-scientific publics about values. Real or perceived conflicts over values or social priorities might include disagreements rooted in faith or political ideology, tensions between freedom vs. security, environmentalism vs. economic development, public interest vs. academic freedom, pro- vs. anti-scientism, or equality vs. liberty, to name just a few. The locus of responsibility for change must therefore shift from solely urging lay publics to “do better” to scientists and institutions—including higher education and philanthropy—modeling and supporting changes within their own domains. Democratic compromise and innovation for breakthrough science require good-faith partnerships with groups who have historically been dismissed as “unreachable,” grounded in a deeper understanding of their values and social identities.

We particularly encourage contributions that move beyond individual-level psychological perspectives on public pathologies. We welcome work that proposes conceptual frameworks, offers empirical findings, or provides institutional models that chart pathways toward democratically beneficial consensus-building in an increasingly fractured world.

Possible Topics

We ask contributors to engage with interdisciplinary scholarly literatures and novel data to explore pro-democratic science-society interfaces. How can we change social norms and institutional incentive systems within science, higher education, or philanthropy to promote meaningful dialogue between scientists and public stakeholders? How should such efforts work when it comes to communities that see their own value systems as at odds with those of the scientific community? What changes to social configurations, institutional realities, political processes, media infrastructures, or engagement practices can enable and incentivize stakeholders on opposing sides to approach public debates about science with compromise mindsets? Areas of particular interest include explorations of:

- mutually agreed-upon goals and resulting strategies for engagement between science and its publics
- genuine respect for and integration of diverse social and political identities in policymaking and public engagement regarding science
- structures and modalities to incentivize compromise over polarization in public debates about science
- the importance and limits of scientific authority in public decision-making about high-stakes issues

We also welcome contributions addressing:

- the role of philanthropy, academic institutions, political actors, etc. in shaping good-faith science communication and public engagement
- the effects of social media algorithms and new media ecologies on mutually respectful deliberation about science
- innovative and scalable participatory models for public engagement with potentially disruptive emerging technologies (e.g., CRISPR, AI, brain-machine interfaces, optogenetics)
- lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for bridging science-public divides

Submissions

We welcome a range of contributions (e.g., empirical, theoretical, case studies) from scholars in communication science, psychology, education, public policy, computational social science, sociology, history of science, science of science, political science, science and technology studies, as well as researchers or leaders in civil society organizations.

Please submit 1,000-word abstracts by **Friday, May 15, 2026** to annals_goodfaith@proton.me.

Process and Timeline

Accepted contributors will be **notified by Wednesday, June 17, 2026**. Selected contributors will participate in a one-day workshop at the Morgridge Institute for Research in **Madison, WI, August 28, 2026**. Participants will present 2,500-word drafts that will be developed into 5,000-word articles for publication in *The ANNALS* due October 15, 2026. All travel costs will be covered for selected participants.