

## The RAISE Project: Do Women Get Their Fair Share of Scientific Awards and Prizes?

Do women get their fair share of scientific awards and prizes? The search for an answer to that question began in fall 2004 and resulted in the RAISE Project (Recognizing the Achievements of Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medicine; [www.RAISEProject.org](http://www.RAISEProject.org)). At that time I was commuting from Buffalo, NY, to Washington, DC, for a position in the Veterans Health Administration. A friend there invited me to the monthly dinners she had started for a small group of women in science and medicine. One dinner was on the day that the National Medal of Science winners were announced. To our dismay we noted that yet again no women were recipients. Discussion ensued. How were we going to fix this problem? Well, if you aren't nominated you can't win. And so began a programmatic effort to increase the recognition of women, specifically by increasing the number of women nominated for scientific awards and prizes.



Stephanie Pincus

### The Power of Data

Since 2005 the RAISE Project (sponsored by The Society for Women's Health Research) has grown into a highly interactive database that provides data and information about scientific awards and prizes. Over 1,500 awards have been cataloged, over 36,000 recipients since 1981 identified, and the gender of each recipient determined. Those data made it clear that, just as many of us always thought, women do not get their fair share. Many scientific awards and prizes have never been given to a woman. And among the awards and prizes we studied, the percent of female winners was consistently less than would be expected on the basis of the number of female PhDs or MDs who received their degree in the appropriate time period. But now we had the data and the power to make changes. (See the "Findings" tab at [www.raiseproject.org](http://www.raiseproject.org) for the actual data.)

Do awards and prizes matter? Absolutely yes! We all need the validation of our work that is provided by awards and prizes. Approval and inner satisfaction count in life. And in academics professional recognition advances careers and may affect promotion and tenure decisions.

Change requires both individual and organizational actions. The first step in both is to recognize the problem. The second step is to accept that there is no overt discrimination. Rather, established organizational structures, implicit bias, and other unconscious factors contribute. Targeted strategies can address both the individual and organizational actions necessary to ensure that women receive the recognition they deserve.

### Individual Actions: Nominate Yourself or Another

Individual actions can be directed toward getting oneself nominated, which often feels decidedly alien to women. Or, equally importantly, they can be directed toward nominating another woman.

Here is a seven-step guide if you want to receive an award or nominate a colleague. It is modified from the RAISE Project website.

#### 1. Use the RAISE website to investigate available awards.

Search by discipline, career level, or sponsor.

- Confirm that you meet the specified requirements such as age, time from dissertation, or membership in the organization.
- Have confidence. Don't fail to apply because you don't think you will win. Many awards actually have fewer nominees than you would expect.

#### 2. Identify the proper award.

- Check previous award winners. Is their work similar to yours or that of your nominee?



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- Check award timelines. Give yourself ample time to put together the best application.
- Think about the characteristics and attainments that are the most important for this award. Will it highlight your strengths?
- Find out who has been/will be on the award committee. If you know a current or past committee member contact them to ask about the award process.

### 3. If you are seeking the award yourself, get nominated.

- Self-nominate or ask a colleague to nominate you. Remember, if you aren't nominated you can't win! Don't be shy. Self-promotion is okay.

### 4. Learn about the nomination process.

- Volunteer to serve on an awards committee.
- Look into unacknowledged rules. For example, although the award language may not say so, some awards emphasize a major discovery while others require sustained scholarly contributions over a whole career.

### 5. Decide on the most effective nominator or secondary nominator.

- Consider award experience. People who have previously received the award or been on the selection committee are good choices.
- Consider prestige. Ask for nominations from people who are arbiters of quality in the field.

- Consider personal commitment. Select people who are excited to endorse the candidate's success!
- Identify the specific role that the nominators/secondary nominators will play and discuss it with them when you ask them for letters.

### 6. Submit the award nomination.

- Follow directions. Simple, but absolutely necessary.
- Confirm the receipt of the materials.

### 7. Resubmit the award nomination.

- Be persistent! Award recipients often have to "wait their turn" on a list.
- Find out whether or not the nomination will be carried forward. If not, find out what additional information is required.

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### Organizational Actions

Organizations often have embedded rules, guidelines,

processes, and structures that work to the disadvantage of women. Addressing these systematically can enhance the likelihood that a woman will receive an award. The RAISE Project has partnered with the Association for Women in Science (AWIS) on a National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant that focuses on scientific disciplinary societies. The AWARDS (Advancing Ways of Awarding Recognition in Disciplinary Societies) Project has identified implicit bias in the award selection process. Visit [www.awis.org/awards](http://www.awis.org/awards) for the AWARDS webcast series presenting research and recommendations.

Phoebe Leboy, University of Pennsylvania, is the PI on the AWARDS Project; other grant collaborators include Anne Lincoln, Southern Methodist University, and Janet Bandows Koster and Alice Popejoy, AWIS. Florence Haseltine, Society for Women's Health Research, is a co-founder of RAISE.

Based on this and other work by the RAISE Project, here are some actions that those of you active in such societies can take.

**Promote transparency.** All scientists like data. Let everyone know who wins awards in your organization, who is on the award committee, and how individuals can be involved in the processes of award selections.

**Encourage participation.** Encourage the women you know in the organization to actively participate in society activities.

## ASCB Awards

The ASCB promotes diversity in the scientific community and is committed to opening its awards to all eligible scientists. To achieve these goals, ASCB members are encouraged to submit nominations for the following awards, which are presented at the ASCB Annual Meeting. Unless indicated, nominations are due on March 31. For details see [www.ascb.org/awards.html](http://www.ascb.org/awards.html).

- Bruce Alberts Award for Excellence in Science Education
- Early Career Life Scientist Award
- E.B. Wilson Medal
- E.E. Just Lecture
- Merton Bernfield Memorial Award (nominations due July 15)
- Norton B. Gilula Award (nominations due July 15)
- Public Service Award
- Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Junior and Senior Awards ■

—Joan R. Goldberg

**Review organizational processes.** Examine the organizational policies and procedures to reduce those that lead to gender bias. Examples of such procedures include having former award winners nominate potential awardees. A failure to address cronyism may put women at a disadvantage.

**Pay attention to committee composition.** It's not enough to just have a woman on award committees. Our studies in collaboration with Anne Lincoln, a sociologist, have shown that the gender of the committee chair is the most important factor in whether a woman receives an award.

**Acknowledge implicit bias.** Unconscious bias and stereotyping affect us all. Consider having programs in the society that educate members about bias.

**Evaluate gender-restricted (women only) awards.** Many organizations have started awards specifically for women. Though it is an honor to get such an award, we all know that in the real world these may not be viewed as highly as gender-neutral awards. Is your society giving women restricted awards rather than the more valued gender-neutral awards?

## Lessons Learned

The first lesson learned from the RAISE Project is that we can make change happen. Things are improving. More women are winning awards and fewer awards are now listed in our “never given to a woman” category. But there is still a lot to be done before women win a proportionate share of awards. It takes collective effort to improve, and all of us can be engaged.

The second lesson learned from the success of RAISE is that networking is crucial for women. Without our regular DC dinners, many of us would still be complaining. Now we are actually changing the game. Using personal contacts and connections to learn what is currently available, garner resources, and implement new programs can convert ideas to enterprises. It really is “who you know” that leads to action. ■

—Stephanie Pincus, *Institute of Medicine*

## Note

Stephanie Pincus is Founding Director of the RAISE Project, an activity of the Society for Women's Health Research. She is a Scholar-in-Residence at the Institute of Medicine.

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## The WICB Awards

In its efforts to support the careers of women scientists, the Women in Cell Biology (WICB) Committee recognizes outstanding achievements in cell biology by presenting two Career Recognition Awards at the ASCB Annual Meeting.

The Junior Award is given to a woman in an early stage of her career who is making exceptional scientific contributions to cell biology, is developing a strong independent research program, and exhibits the potential for continuing a high level of scientific endeavor and leadership.

The Senior Award is given to a woman or man in a later career stage whose outstanding scientific achievements are coupled with a long-standing record of support for women in science and by mentorship of both men and women in scientific careers. For more information, visit [www.ascb.org/wicbawards.html](http://www.ascb.org/wicbawards.html).

The WICB Committee views its awards to women not as endpoints but as potential stepping stones to other awards. The Committee recognizes that a nominator who follows the guidelines for submitting a nomination for a WICB award has in hand a package he or she can use with minimal rewriting to nominate the candidate for other awards.

Two winners of the Junior Award, Julie Theriot (1994) and Yukiko Yamashita (2009), subsequently received MacArthur Fellowships. ■

—Sandra Masur, *for the Women in Cell Biology Committee*