Impact Identities: An Overview

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Impact identity[1] is the "sweet spot" of what you **might do**, what you **should do**, and what you **can do** as it relates to your engagement and research impact. Just as your social identities are unique to you, so too will your impact identity be unique to your individual interests, capabilities, and contexts.

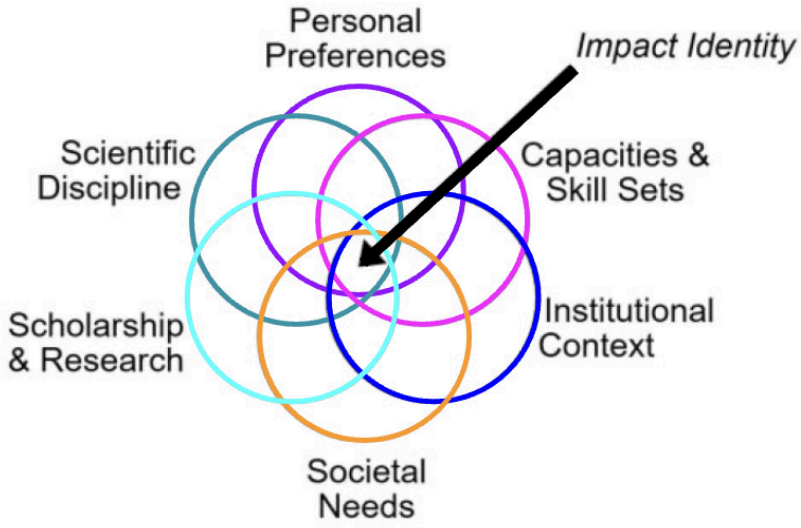

Fig. 1 Multiple dimensions of identity and contexts to explore and integrate in the process of unveiling one's impact identity.

The concept of an impact identity emerged from the broader impacts with science space but is largely applicable across fields and forms of engagement.

There are a number of dimensions to consider as you develop your impact identity. Risien & Storksdieck (2018) describe these dimensions as:

1. "Personal identities and intrinsic motivators make up the **personal preference dimension**. Are you a parent, musician, minority woman in science? Do you enjoy working with children, youth, or adults? Do you see yourself as a communicator, teacher, or inventor? Are you an activist, environmentalist, engaged in civic action?

[1] From Risien, J. & Storksdieck, M. (2018). Unveiling Impact Identities: A Path for Connecting Science and Society. *Integrative and Comparative Biology* 58(1): 58-66. doi:10.1093/icb/icy011 [Fig. 1 - color added]

2. Individuals have certain **capacities and skill sets** that are somewhat innate or have been cultivated over time, and can guide the type of public engagement that might most suitably fit with a scientist's personal traits and interests. Are you a patient listener? Are you equipped to work with underserved audiences? Do you engage well with children? Are you an introvert or an extrovert? Can you explain your research to lay audiences?

3. One's approach to **research and scholarship** adds a dimension that is deeply connected to the everyday professional practice of scientists. Through broader impacts, scholarship often expands beyond the boundaries of a discipline or the core of a research portfolio. What is the nature of your research? What instrumentation do you use? How applied, practical, or theoretical is your research? What are the links between your research topic and potential applications? How might your broader impacts work open new dimensions of scholarship? To what degree might connections outside your circle of disciplinary colleagues support your career trajectory?

4. Institutions also have identities, and scientists do their work within the **context of the institutions** they inhabit. To what degree does your institution appreciate, support, and reward investments into broader impacts work? Does your institution have a public service or outreach mission? How is your institution connected to various local or regional communities? What kind of infrastructure exists through your institution to support what type of broader impact efforts (e.g., office of commercialization; institutional connection to local schools or science museums; public speaker or science cafe/pub series; opportunities to influence policies, legislation, or regulations; etc.)?

5. **Disciplines** of science are a major contributor to scientists' professional identities. Affinity with and connection among a disciplinary group is often a prominent dimension of identity. What critical questions drive your discipline? To what degree are fundamentals of your discipline already part of a K-16 curriculum? What are norms within your disciplinary society around broader impact work? How do your successful colleagues conduct their broader impacts?

6. **[Societal needs** -] either known or perceived [- reflect] the societal benefits of [an individual's] particular research, acknowledging that not all research portfolios easily translate into direct benefits beyond contributions to the scientific knowledge base." (pp 62-63)

Considering each of these dimensions - as well as the intersections between them as it relates to your aspirations for your scholarship and engagement - is an important and valuable step in strategically designing a project portfolio that can help you to achieve your desired impacts.