

iSWOOP2: Interpreters and Scientists Working On-Site at Our Parks

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Interpreters and Scientists Working On Our Parks (iSWOOP) is funded by the National Science Foundation as a model program to build visitors' understanding of science at National Parks. The National Science Foundation and the National Park Service both include public education in their mission statements.

This project is meant to advance STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning among national park visitors. iSWOOP2 will bring together educators, scientists, and National Park Service (NPS) interpreters to incorporate site-based science into programs for the public.

Project staff seek to build expertise within the interpreter and ranger community. Staff engage with the researchers on site, and host sessions to help the rangers interpret complex data, and then to ask informed questions of the researchers. When the rangers come to a deeper understanding of the research, their interactions with visitors are also transformed. Rangers learn from iSWOOP to guide visitors to answer their own or each others' questions in order to build scientific literacy.

iSWOOP will support the NPS in fulfilling its educational vision by enhancing interpreter-visitor interactions in four ways, by providing interpreters with:

- Direct contact with scientists doing research in the park in an interactive format;
- Field-based experiences, increasing their awareness of scientific park-based research;
- Compelling visual data and graphs which can function as a jumping off point for STEM learning;
- Ongoing opportunities to reflect on and then improve their interactions with visitors, increasing their strategies for leveraging visitors' questions for active inquiry.

As iSWOOP2 moves to other parks, visitors there will have a chance to learn about the cutting edge research going on at that park—within yards or a few miles of where they are standing.

TERC's role is to design professional development for park rangers, to support implementation of programs based on scientists' visualizations, to research what impression these images make on visitors. The iSWOOP project team will collect questions and observations to study what is striking to visitors who have the opportunity to learn about scientists' use of cutting edge technology.

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