

The AACR Associate Member Council's (AMC) Key Takeaways from the AACR Annual Meeting 2021

This year, for the second time, AACR held a completely virtual Annual Meeting with two weeks of [engaging programs](#). The second week included Educational Sessions, Methods Workshops, Meet the Expert Sessions, and [Professional Advancement Sessions](#), with even more content specifically designed for early career researchers (ECRs). Here, several attendees share their experiences and takeaways from the 2021 AACR Annual Meeting.

Networking at the Virtual Annual Meeting:

In order to provide ECRs with networking opportunities, AACR developed a “Channel Chat” where discussions could be found throughout the meeting in different working groups, a Networking Profile opportunity, and Live Q&A sessions with the presenters.

“My favorite aspect of the AACR annual meeting is reuniting with old friends and forming new connections. I worried that the virtual meeting would diminish these important interactions. To my delight, the conference platform made it easy to contact other participants! By sharing our schedules, I could even see who attended the same presentations and compare notes. I'm grateful to AACR for delivering a fantastic meeting, including the valuable conversations that happen off-stage.” - Dr. Pete DelNero

Professional Advancement Session: “Important Strategies for Success in Cancer Science: Keys for Early-Stage Investigators”

This interactive panel discussion provided a unique opportunity for new investigators at the junior faculty/equivalent level to learn skills and strategies for addressing questions that can affect their success in the first independent leadership position. The session was specifically designed for those who have already made the transition from trainee to the next career stage inside and outside academia.

“The ease of access to both scientific and professional development sessions through the online format provided an opportunity for continued engagement during the virtual meeting. A highlight was the professional development session discussing the ‘Important strategies for success in cancer science’. The opportunity for interactive discussions with scientific leaders from various career paths allowed for engaging conversations that provided a unique and honest insight into challenges researchers can face during career progression, while also providing advice on how they can be overcome.” - Dr. Maeve Mullooly

“I took away several great tips from this panel discussion: 1) have a Big Picture of what your lab does - use this to stay focused because it's easy to get stretched too thin when you first become

independent; 2) utilize BioRxiv.org to establish yourself - this is a great way to document progress before your manuscripts are in press; 3) establish yourself professionally on social media - you can amplify the awareness of great science (including your own) quickly this way; 4) write fewer, high quality grants rather than applying for everything you can find - be strategic and efficient with your time. The speakers were really knowledgeable, and I found it especially helpful to hear from Dr. Amy Moran because she is still relatively early in her career and shared some tips I hadn't heard before." - Dr. Kristin Anderson

Professional Advancement Session: "In transition: from Early-career researcher to leader"

During this session, Dr. Andrea Holowatyj and Dr. Chirag Patel provided early-career researchers with advice and guidance on ways they can become recognized as leaders within their field and within their current position (either academia or other).

"I really enjoyed listening to advice and guidance from Dr. Holowatyj and Dr. Patel during the In Transition session! Having recently made the transition from early career researcher to faculty, they were able to provide invaluable tips about this process, from research-specific topics to work-life balance. I appreciated their openness and honesty about this significant transition, and certainly enjoyed the interactive format as well." - Dr. Erica Tsang

Professional Advancement Session: "Careers and collaborations in academia and industry"

During this session, Dr. Priscilla K. Brastianos and Dr. Francis Hunter addressed how to initiate and establish a successful collaboration, differences between these approaches for academia and industry, how to identify and avoid red flags for bad collaborations, and how to deal with unsuccessful collaborations. Dr. Hunter also addressed the differences between his career in industry and his time in academia.

"I thoroughly enjoyed co-moderating the Professional Advancement session with Drs. Brastianos and Hunter. The speakers provided great advice for building a network and managing collaborations from both the academic and industry perspective, and I particularly appreciated their insights coming from direct experience at the intersection of the two worlds. The live Q&A session provided an engaging forum for additional discussion, and the interactive format was very successful among attendees." – Dr. Francesco Caiazza

Personalized Career Conversations

This free session provided a unique opportunity for early-career AACR Associate members to be paired with a distinguished senior cancer research leader for a 15-minute one-on-one conversation. In the virtual session waiting room, the session co-chairs, Drs. Antonio T. Baines, Victoria M. Richon, and Danny R. Welch, held an informal panel that addressed various topics related to the career development of early-career researchers including advice on interviewing and negotiations, how to give a chalk talk, the different faces of academia and more.

“I really look forward to the opportunity to meet new investigators at the AACR Annual Meeting, and I was excited that the virtual format found unique ways to facilitate these interactions. In the Personalized Career Conversations, Drs. Baines, Welch, and Richon did a really great job of engaging all participants in discussion over the course of the session, and the breakout rooms provided a focused setting to really get to know the senior scientists in the field. I appreciate the emphasis AACR places on supporting early career scientists and trainees, especially through the professional advancement sessions that motivate and inform our career aspirations.” - Dr. Katie Campbell

In addition to professional advancement sessions mentioned above, a number of important key scientific sessions also took place and a summary of meeting highlights can be found [here](#) and in the [AACR News](#). While the 2021 Annual Meeting came to a close in May this year, preparations are already underway for the [AACR Annual Meeting 2022](#) and please keep an eye out for updates and opportunities to apply for [training and scholarship awards](#).