Q&A with the 2013 McGrath Fellows
Interviewed by Emily Schuster

Last October, a museum director from Brazil, a museum educator from Uruguay, a science teacher from Zimbabwe, and a deputy general director of a brand new science park in Israel joined nearly 1,700 attendees from 43 countries at the 2013 ASTC Annual Conference in Albuquerque. These four professionals were the recipients of the Lee Kimche McGrath Worldwide Fellowship (www.astc.org/about/awards/mcgrath.htm), thanks to significant financial support from the Gelfand family.

Named for ASTC’s first executive director, the Fellowship helps individuals from science centers and museums outside the United States attend the ASTC Annual Conference, in the hope that this experience will help them in the development of their institutions and the growth of the field worldwide. This year’s Fellows—Diego Vaz Bevilaqua, director of Museu da Vida/Fiocruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Fiorella Silveira Segui, head of education at Espacio Ciencia, Laboratorio Tecnológico del Uruguay, Montevideo; Susan Wairimu Mahachi, a science teacher at Chisipite School, Harare, Zimbabwe, who has started working on creating the Zimbabwe Science Centre; and Netzach Farbiash, deputy general director for scientific content at Carasso Science Park, Beer Sheva, Israel—came to conference seeking opportunities to network and gather resources and ideas.

We spoke to the McGrath Fellows during ASTC 2013 to learn about their institutions’ current work and future goals and challenges.

In what ways is your institution’s work meaningful to its community?

Bevilaqua: Well, Museu da Vida, it’s located on the campus of Fiocruz in Rio de Janeiro, and it’s a large campus . . . and it’s all surrounded by poor communities. The three major poor communities in Rio are located around the campus of Fiocruz. So one thing that has been stressed at the museum, and we are increasing a lot this year and we plan to continue this movement over the next years, is to really do a long-term relationship and associations with the schools that surround the campus, so to actually have the populations surrounding the campus of Fiocruz to participate in the museum life more actively.

Silveira Segui: Espacio Ciencia is a museum, and the only one museum of science in Montevideo, Uruguay. We provide teachers and students tools to partner with science. We have many workshops about a variety of terms, and we have also a school for scientists that we bring students to do activities related to scientific work in laboratories.
**Mahachi:** Well, the science center that is up and coming, its first objective is to reach the students, not only in the private schools but also in the high-density schools and in the rural schools, so one of the main goals right now is to get a hold of a mobile center, which will be able to go out and reach the rural schools in particular, where science, particularly hands-on, practical science, is really not available for them, is not accessible for them because of the cost. Another objective that we have in the long term is to reach communities and talk about issues of sustainability, of health, of clean water, and energy, which I think are really key issues of today’s concerns.

**Farbiash:** First of all, the location of Carasso Science Park is in Beer Sheva. The surrounding area is 30% of Arabic speaking—that means that all of the park is in three languages—Hebrew, Arabic, and English—which is very, very important. In addition, we have in our guides, Arabic-speaking guides, so the local community with all its variety will be able to understand and to communicate with the guides inside the science park. In addition, since it’s a very new one, only three months on the air, we have some programs that are made together with the Ministry of Education, so all the kids around from all schools, doesn’t matter if the principal wants to come or not—everybody comes. That way we can explore and can show science for everybody. After that we have some programs for afternoon activities for everybody, like scientific lectures, some events during the holidays, which is open to everybody, and we start seeing that people are coming.

**What challenges and opportunities lie ahead for your institution?**

**Bevilaqua:** Well, right now we have a big challenge for the next six, seven years, that Fiocruz is a century-old institution. And it has a couple of buildings that are from the beginning of the institution. Right now the museum occupies totally one of these buildings from the central park institution, and partially the Morisco Castle—that’s a huge castle that was the first laboratories of the institution. We are planning to have all these buildings that’s occupied by the administrative staff and use it all for cultural purpose, especially scientific exhibitions, so that we will juggle the space of the exhibitions, of the museum opened up to the public, and we will have opportunity to export more what science is being done right now by the institution. So that’s a huge challenge that we have before us. We are still planning it, raising funds, and thinking about a conception. But it will be like a huge enterprise and that’s something exciting.

**Silveira Segui:** We are planning to go on with workshops with students and also improve the . . . and go on working with teachers and proposing workshops for teachers to improve the knowledge about science, and also to bring students by us
because now we don’t have the opportunity some of us to bring the students, so that’s one thing that we want to do.

**Mahachi:** Well, our key challenge is to get our science center out and up and functioning. And as I said earlier, the first and the biggest criteria right now is to get a mobile center so we that can reach the students and reach communities outside, so funding basically is our key objective at the moment, to be able to get that mobile center working. From there we’ll also be able to have workshops for teachers and also be able to bring in people to the school where the science center is currently centered and be able to offer workshops to them, bring students to them school and be able to offer them workshops. So basically, in a nutshell, I can say our biggest challenge is funding.

**Farbiash:** First of all, Beer Sheva is not a touristic city, so when we want to bring people out of town, we have to tell them, “Please come over,” it’s not like Jerusalem, that people are coming anyhow and then all you have to do is just say come to the museum and they will come. We have to do all the work in order to bring people from other places and say there’s something going on in Beer Sheva and you should come. So this is one challenge. The other one is to create science activities as common, as activity people used to go to because it wasn’t that way until a few months ago. And the other one is that we have a few languages—that we have Hebrew and Arabic going together, and of course, English as well, so we have guides that can speak at least two languages. We must understand which groups are coming and as well as to translate and write and program and create movies, everything in three languages—it’s not an easy task.

So we have just started—so everything is like going to the future! I had the chance of being from the very beginning three years ago where we created most of the things and it’s like a dream come true to see everything that you have been working on, dreaming on, thinking on, just starting to work. So the first thing is to see that everything is really working according to the plans, and those parts aren’t that they’re being fixed and adjusted to what is really happening in the field. Second, we have to see that although everything is new that we are already starting to work on renewing some of this stuff because within a year or two or three, people would like to know what’s new. So this is a challenge—and of course, the challenge of working through limited budget, which is I guess a problem of everybody. To see how we can use and make the best out of what we have. And gathering some more partners to be involved in the park, especially the community because when the community understands they have an asset that is a science park, they like to use it and to come and to feel like second house, second home, which has been very important.
What do you hope to gain from attending ASTC 2013?

Bevilaqua: Well, first of all, networking. Museum of Life has always been part of international collaboration. It’s part of ASTC, Ecsite, Red Pop. And as I assumed recently, since July, the position of head officer of the museum, first thing I need is to—national, international, all those institutions, it’s the mantle for the work of the museum, and second also to, as we have these expansion plans for the next year, to gather resources about new exhibitions, new ideas, infrastructure, . . . buildings, and all sort of information that ASTC that I can get from a lot of science centers. It’s a huge amount of science centers together, so that’s great.

Silveira Segui: To have the opportunity to be in touch with other educators and to know about what other museums are doing, the new technologies that in Uruguay we don’t have the opportunity to be in touch with that, so I’m very happy to be here.

Mahachi: For me, it’s been the opportunity to find out how people make exhibits, work exhibits, and also to network with people, create networks so that we have access to more materials and resources through the networks, and also to build partnerships, because I think that there is so much that is on offer and with partnerships, it will really help us to move forward and get this science center up and running sooner.

Farbiash: First to get to know many of our colleagues around the world, to have a network that can help in delivering ideas and to think about future things and collaboration between different places because we are not the first science park in the world and others have been trying to solve problems that we are just starting to have now. So it might be very interesting to know. I think since everything is new, we have nice ideas that others might like to know about. We are willing to share in whatever is needed. Second, to see some of the commercial companies that present very nice ideas and it’s very nice to see everything around and to get different ideas. And third, to present our part that people know that there is a new science park, a large and nice one in Israel, to invite everybody to visit and to come to see.