



# Coordinated, multi-institutional Brain Awareness Week activities in New York City

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## Brain Awareness Week 2013 in New York City: a braiNY experience

*braiNY seeks to raise the public profile of brain science through the efforts of neuroscientists, coordinated by the Greater New York City chapter of the Society for Neuroscience*

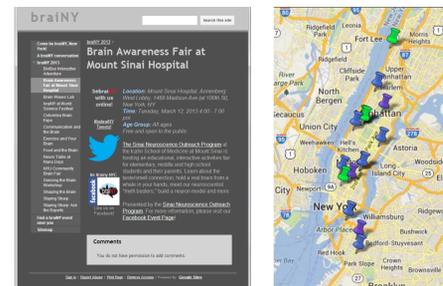
In celebration of Brain Awareness Week (BAW) 2013, diverse academic and cultural institutions across New York City hosted 20 loosely coordinated events, up from no coordinated events in previous years. This group effort, entitled braiNY, was organized through the Greater New York City chapter of the Society for Neuroscience, with the support of the Dana Foundation, the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, and numerous partners. In total, 13 groups collectively sponsored 20 new or ongoing events that involved over 150 scientist volunteers and reached close to 3000 people of all ages.

Academic institutions viewed braiNY participation as an easy, low-cost way to increase their public profile. The participating museum was eager to expand its brain science offering and provide its visitors a unique experience. Cultural groups who made their regularly scheduled events brain-themed benefitted from new audiences.

**We propose braiNY as a model for how individual groups or institutions offering modest (or no) BAW programs can coalesce with targeted but minimal planning and oversight, aligning efforts in a multi-institutional, city-wide celebration of brain science.**

## Navigating BAW 2103

As part of Brain Awareness Week 2013, braiNY volunteers built a free website using sites.google.com (left) to advertise more than 20 loosely coordinated events. An event map (right), color-coded by target audience ages, guided people at a glance to events in their area.



## Benefits of a loose organizational structure

- Education/outreach expertise.** Individuals and groups who may not have felt qualified to host their own events were bolstered by the support and resources of the Chapter and its partners.
- Access to shared resources.** braiNY leaders from various institutions linked scientist volunteers to events needing support, contributed expertise, and shared resources such as plastinated brains.
- Publicity.** The cross-promotional braiNY publicity campaign included a central website, Facebook page and Twitter hashtag. braiNY fliers distributed throughout New York City enhanced publicity and encouraged people to attend multiple events. These promotional materials and web-based components were all generated by braiNY members.
- Involvement of non-academic groups.** Recognizing that groups outside of academic settings were already engaging public audiences in novel ways, we increased our reach by encouraging the use of brain science as a theme for scheduled events in March.

### Mobile and community science stations



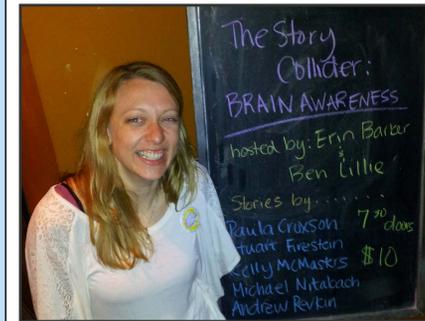
Participants learn about brains, neurons, and creativity at BioBus, a lab-on-wheels, in NYC's Washington Square Park. Genspace, an open biolab in Brooklyn, also hosted brain-themed events.

### Brain-themed activity fairs



An attendee at Mount Sinai's Brain Awareness Fair looks at neurons under a microscope. Columbia and NYU also hosted open brain-themed activity fairs for school groups and families.

### Storytelling about science



Dr. Paula Croxson, of Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, prepares to tell her story at Story Collider at Union Hall in Brooklyn, NY. Other brain-themed cultural events were hosted by Nerd Nite, SpotOn NYC, The Moth, and the New School.

### Classroom demonstrations



Volunteers from Hunter College show 5th graders at Success Academy in Harlem the structures and functions of the brain through sheep brain dissections during BAW.

### Panel discussion for adults



Dr. Frances Champagne speaks about the role of early environment on gene expression and behavior at Columbia University. Other events included "Staying Sharp" programs focused on healthy brain aging and "Exercise and your brain" at NYU.

### Museum-sponsored events



Visitors to the Brain waves lab at the American Museum of Natural History measure the electrical activity of their muscles using the EMG Spiker Box from Backyard Brains. This was one of several special themed events at the museum.

## 5 tips for planning coordinated BAW activities

1. Start planning early
2. Designate a core leadership team to meet regularly
3. Include event volunteers in planning content
4. Reach out to as many diverse groups as possible
5. Build an online presence

## Visit comebebraiNY.com

As part of our plans for BAW 2014 and beyond, braiNY has invested in a new website. We purchased a domain name and built a custom site to better reach the public in New York City and beyond.



Visit our new and improved website for updates, resources, and to contact us.

## Future directions

- Invite additional institutions and cultural groups to join efforts
- Improve volunteer tracking and leadership coordination using Google Groups
- Expand the geographical reach outside of Manhattan
- Include non-English events (e.g. Spanish, Mandarin Chinese)
- New events to include cross-disciplinary science evenings and public health forums featuring clinicians

## Call to action

- Visit our website for updates on BAW 2014 (comebebraiNY.com)
- If you are in the New York City area, join us for braiNY 2014 as an event host or participant
- Join us online on December 2 at 1:00 pm EST for a Google Hangout about BAW organizing. See our website for details
- Join in the conversation at NeurOnline (<http://neuronline.sfn.org>) in the group Outreach and Education: Brain Awareness
- Send us your comments or suggestions! [greaternycsfn@gmail.com](mailto:greaternycsfn@gmail.com)

## BAW NYC 2013 Partners

The Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives | The Greater NYC Chapter Society for Neuroscience | NYU Neuroscience Institute | NYU Center for Neural Science | The Rockefeller University | The Italian Academy at Columbia University | The Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute at Columbia University | Hunter College | Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai | The American Museum of Natural History | BioBus | The Rubin Museum | SpotOn | The Story Collider | AARP | The Moth | Nerd Nite | Genspace



## Tools and outcomes

| Tool  | Rationale   | Outcome (when applicable)   |
|---|---|---|
| Website   | A central location for event details facilitated information sharing. People who went to the link to find one event could discover others.        | Google Analytics taken from the three weeks around BAW (March 1-21, 2013) logged 2,133 visits from 1,621 unique visitors (76% new visitors and 24% returning visitors). |
| Facebook  | A social media platform enabled sharing and helped us tap into existing online networks   | Facebook metrics indicated 609 unique users engaged with our page, and 61,427 people saw a Sponsored Story in the 28 day period including BAW.                          |
| Twitter (@bebraiNY)                                 | A social media platform enabled sharing and helped us access existing online networks   |   |
| Flier   | We printed fliers to distribute before BAW and at events early in the week to promote events later in the week.                                   | Hundreds of fliers distributed at events throughout the city.   |
| Logo  | Using in-house talent, we designed a catchy logo to visually identify our events  | We requested all partners to use the logo when publicizing their own event  |
| Attendance  | Each partner submitted counts or estimates of the number of people who attended each event.   | Approximately 3000 people attended events in person and online  |
| Volunteers  | Each partner submitted counts of the number of volunteers at each event.  | 150 volunteers  |
| Institutional partnerships                          | We recruited partners to host events, expanding the reach beyond what only a few people could run   | Six academic institutions ran brain-themed events in honor of BAW.  |
| Partnerships with cultural organizations and groups | We reached a larger audience by encouraging groups with regular events to use the theme of BAW or cross-promoted events they already had planned. | Six non-academic partners ran brain-themed programming in honor of BAW.   |

## List of Events

| Event name   | braiNY partner                         | Website                         | Event or series description  |
|--|--|---------------------------------|--|
| Brain Waves labs   | American Museum of Natural History     | www.amnh.org                    | Open lab experience for families   |
| Food and the Brain   | AMNH                                   | amnh.org                        | Workshops and lab drop in for families   |
| NeuroTable at Nanodays   | AMNH                                   | amnh.org                        | Neuroscience on the nano scale presented to school groups  |
| BioBus Interactive Adventure                                   | BioBus                                 | biobus.org                      | Lab-on-wheels parked in a public plaza for people to walk in and learn about the brain                   |
| Brain Expo   | Columbia University                    | columbiabrain.com               | Open event for school groups and families to learn from scientists                                       |
| Shaping the Brain  | Columbia University                    | zuckermaninstitute.columbia.edu | Evening panel discussion for adults about the influence of genes, art, and the environment on perception |
| Sensing and the Brain  | Genspace                               | genspace.org                    | Open lab promoting citizen science and access to biotechnology   |
| Google hangout   | GNYC Chapter of SFN                    | google.com                      | SFN past and future presidents discuss the importance of neuroscience outreach                           |
| School Visit   | Hunter College in the City of New York | hunter.cuny.edu                 | Visit to 5th grade classroom at Success Academy in Harlem  |
| Staying Sharp  | Hunter College in the City of New York | hunter.cuny.edu                 | Panel discussion for adults focused on brain health and aging lecture for adults                         |
| Brain Awareness Fair   | Icahn School of Med at Mt. Sinai       | icahn.mssm.edu/                 | Open event for school groups and families to drop in and learn from scientists                           |
| What happens when the tooth fairy takes away your sweet tooth? | Nerd Nite                              | nyc.nerdnite.org                | Quirky lectures about science  |
| Exercise and Your Brain  | NYU                                    | nyu.edu                         | intensi workout followed by a lecture about the effects of exercise on brain function                    |
| Brain Fair   | NYU Langone Medical Center             | med.nyu.edu                     | Open event for school groups and families to learn from scientists                                       |
| Staying Sharp  | NYU Langone Medical Center             | med.nyu.edu                     | Panel discussion for adults focused on brain health and aging lecture for adults                         |
| Communication and the brain                                    | SpotOn NYC                             | nature.com/spotonin/new-york/   | Monthly discussion series on policy, outreach, and science tools   |
| Brain Awareness  | Story Collider                         | storycollider.org               | Storytelling about science   |
| Going Sane   | The Moth                               | themoth.org                     | Storytelling series  |
| Arts in Mind festival  | The New School                         | artsinmind.org                  | Conversations on art and mental health   |

## New York City BAW Partners and Events

