

Project Title: Conference Funding: 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Eastern Regional Photosynthesis Conference

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Applicant institution: Loyola University Chicago

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The 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Eastern Regional Photosynthesis Conference took place as scheduled at the University of Chicago Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, Massachusetts on April 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The conference was held as intended in a hybrid format, with 76 on-site attendees and a further 47 remote participants at peak attendance. Eight invited talks, 19 contributed talks, and 22 posters were presented during the conference. A junior faculty development event was implemented for the first time at this conference, which resulted in new collaborations between participants and one postdoctoral researcher receiving advice which likely contributed to a tenure-track appointment. In total, six undergraduates, 19 graduate students, and 5 postdoctoral researchers benefited from support from the DOE provided under this grant. Four of these attendees were students from Loyola University Chicago, the recipient institution, who would not have otherwise been able to attend due to not having adequate institutional support. All of the undergraduates who attended would not have been able to attend without the support of the DOE. Attendees at this conference came from 19 states and (remotely) South Africa.

The Eastern Regional Photosynthesis Conference has long prided itself on being an incubator for future talent which contributes to the Photosynthetic Systems program in particular and the US Department of Energy more broadly. The 2023 iteration brought together researchers from all stages of their careers across industry, academia, and government settings to exchange ideas, forge collaborations, and help develop the potential of the next generation in photosynthesis research. This conference directly brought about contacts between groups which subsequently began collaborating, facilitated community support for a postdoctoral researcher moving to the region from elsewhere to begin a tenure-track position, resulted in undergraduate students finding graduate mentors in DOE-supported programs, and introduced DOE-supported principal investigators to new methods which have facilitated subsequent research. In addition to the students who attended in-person, many of the remote attendees were undergraduates who could not afford the travel cost in that year, but some of these students subsequently were able to attend the DOE-supported 41<sup>st</sup> Eastern Regional Photosynthesis Conference in 2024 and were inspired to do so as a result of this conference. Overall, the organizers and the conference board believe this event was a positive contribution to the community and well worth the investment from the DOE.

Efforts to invite a younger and more diverse pool of speakers were generally successful, including several first-time attendees who have since returned or become active participants in other DOE-supported photosynthesis conferences such as the Midwest/Southeast Photosynthesis Conference, which is co-chaired this year by one of our junior invited speakers. While this conference has historically skewed strongly male, a majority of our invited speakers and 45% of in-person attendees were women. The geographical reach of the conference was extended in 2023, with large contingents of attendees from Illinois, Missouri, and Texas as well as the usual representation from the Northeast region. The record-keeping and outreach initiatives implemented in the 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference were retained and built upon for the 41<sup>st</sup> annual conference in 2024, which saw even higher attendance and increased representation from geographically, ethnically, economically, gender, and research-level diverse participants.