

ABSTRACT:

Communicating about The Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life: Different Searches, Different Issues

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Current searches for evidence of extraterrestrial life are accomplished in a number of distinctly different ways. The various searches can be viewed in three general categories: 1) 'SETI' searches for messages from extraterrestrial civilizations, 2) exploration for extrasolar or habitable planets, and 3) searches within the solar system (e.g., planetary missions, meteorites, cosmochemistry). Each search-type occurs in different locations, uses different scientific instruments and methods, and seeks different types of evidence and data. Moreover, the meaning and implications of a 'discovery' in each of the categories are different, as are the policy, legal and societal ramifications. In considering how to manage future communications about the discovery of extraterrestrial life, it will be important to understand these distinctions, anticipate relevant concerns and issues, and be prepared to explain them clearly to the public.