

Implementing Portals of the Universe

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In 2007, the National Research Council completed a thorough comparative review of NASA astronomy centers, assessing the roles and services that they provide to the community. The conclusions from that review are summarized in the NRC publication “Portals of the Universe”. These include recommendations that NASA should adopt a set of best practices as guiding principles to ensure the effectiveness of existing astronomy science centers, and that NASA should ensure that science centers should cooperate among themselves and with other agencies to develop strategies and plans. The purpose of this workshop is to provide a forum to understand the current processes used by various astrophysics science centers and identify the current best practices candidates in a report to the Astrophysics Division.

The participants in this workshop will include representatives from the Chandra X-ray Center, the Spitzer Science Center, the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center, the NASA Exoplanet Science Institute, Space Telescope Science Institute, Goddard Space Flight Center (SWIFT mission), NASA-Ames (Kepler), and the SOFIA Science Center. Each center will be asked to report on their process for each of the following areas and what they consider works well or not and why:

- Proposal process
 - Schedules and coordination with other observatories (ground and space)
 - Submission tools and proposal format
 - Evaluation processes
 - Grant administration and budget processes
- Community interaction
 - User committee
 - Newsletters and Technical Reports
- User support
 - Documentation needs prior to proposal submission
 - User query support/helpdesk
 - Direct support during observations
 - Post-observation support for data reduction and analysis
 - User committee
- Operational processes
 - Observation planning and scheduling
 - Instrument calibration
- Archival support
 - Data Storage
 - Long-term data curation

In addition, each participant will be asked to identify issues they may have with Astrophysics science policy issues and suggestions for improvements. In particular,

- Duplication policies

- Data Access restrictions
- Complaint processes

The workshop will be held at the Space Telescope Science Institute, Baltimore, in Spring 2012. It will last 1 day. It is anticipated that 2-4 representatives from each science center will attend the workshop in person, and the meeting will be webcast in a manner to allow interactive participation by scientists at remote locations. Remote attendees will be asked to register in advance of the workshop.

The meeting format will comprise a series of 30-45 minute presentations by a representative from each science center, followed by a 30 minutes period for further discussion. A final session will be scheduled for developing the final products of the workshop:

1. A document giving feedback on NASA policies that are constraining operation and may require modification. 3 topics were mentioned: proprietary time; processes for awarding DD time (which probably falls under the proposal process discussion); and guaranteed time for science centers.
2. A best practices document, to be used as a guide for establishing future science operation centers. The NRC Portal report gives high level guidance; this document will focus more on implementation. Contrasts between large and small missions should be drawn, where appropriate. There may also be differences stemming from operational modes: surveys vs GO-dominated missions; collaborative missions with other agencies vs NASA-only missions; multi-user vs PI-led missions.

At the end of the workshop, an oral outbrief will be presented to the Astrophysics Division and a written presentation provided to the Astrophysics Division within one month after the workshop.

The presentations, report to the Astrophysics Division, and the webcast will be archived at STScI and made available to the broader community, with links established at the appropriate NASA SMD web pages.