STScI | SPACE TELESCOPE SCIENCE INSTITUTE

EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF SPACE ASTRONOMY

Augmenting community input to user committees

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STScI

The role of user committees

- User committees are the formal interface between STScI/HST Project and the community, providing advice on all aspects of observatory operations.

- NASA has asked STScI to explore means of using modern tools and methodologies to collect "wider community input on its missions' policy and procedural matters to augment, improve on its current user committee model. "
  - Formal request is presented as a task order under the JWST contract but extends beyond JWST to include HST & MAST and looks forward to Roman

- Two particular instances:
  - An avenue for suggestions from the community on general policy/procedural topics
    - Community → STUC
  - Collecting broad community feedback with regard to specific policy/procedural issues
    - STUC → community → STUC

- Recommendations will focus on expanding input to the user committee, not on establishing independent communication channels to STScI/Project

Charge from NASA HQ

We request AURA/STScI to conduct a study on how to use modern tools and methodologies for collecting wide community input on its missions' policy and procedural matters to augment, improve on its current user committee model. Additionally, the study should adhere to NASA's goals for diversity, equity and inclusion in the community using its funded missions when they consider ways or tools to collect community input. The current, largely in person methods for obtaining community input and feedback (e.g., user committees, meeting town halls) should be assessed for their effectiveness via metrics that could be tracked through any proposed changes to measure improvements. Metrics should include cost deltas at STScI for implementing any changes. Community input practices for the Hubble, Webb, and Roman telescopes should be considered as well those for the MAST. Where appropriate, STScI should use relevant social science expertise and engage members of the community currently not represented in providing advice to AURA/STScI to assist this study. If warranted by the study findings, also recommend alternatives for the existing user committees. This study is not intended to examine how STScI itself is evaluated by AURA (i.e., the STIC and its processes).

The duration of the study should be a maximum of six (6) months. A draft report consisting of initial findings and recommendations as well as work remaining shall be delivered to the respective Project Offices at GSFC and the NASA Headquarters Astrophysics Division. The draft report will be required four (4) months after issuance of this Task Order. A final report consisting of findings and recommendations for any improvements shall be delivered to the respective Project Offices at GSFC and the NASA Headquarters Astrophysics Division for consideration of implementation.

Questions for the STUC

- How are existing avenues of communication being used?
    - Informal member contacts – number, frequency
    - Formal letters, emails – number, frequency
    - Which method(s) do you find most effective?

- Are there additional communication avenues that could be explored?
    - Passive – additional communication channels
    - Active – direct solicitation of input

- Are there segments of the community that are poorly represented in the present system?
    - How would we change that situation?

We would appreciate your feedback on these questions, ideally within ~4 weeks

Next steps

- Internal STScI coordination group
  - Neill Reid (AD Sci), Alessandra Aloisi (SMO), Antonella Nota (ESA), Josh Peek (DSMO), Lou Strolger (SMO/INS)

- We are soliciting input from current user committees
  - STUC
  - JSTUC
  - MUG

- We are soliciting input from comparable organisations
  - Chandra, NOAO, NRAO, SOFIA, NASA Keck,

- We are considering mechanisms to solicit direct input from the community
  - Passive mechanisms – establish email to collect responses
  - Active mechanisms – target specific community members