



**NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22230**

**Division of Astronomical Sciences
Directorate of Mathematical and Physical Sciences**

23 June 2011

Letter to AST Facility Directors regarding the Portfolio Review

Dear Facility Director:

The Astro2010 Decadal Survey Report made its recommendations to NSF in the context of a projected budget that would double in ten years. The report also explicitly noted (p. 240) that "If the realized budget is truly flat in FY2010 dollars ...there is no possibility of implementing any of the recommended program this decade – without achieving significant savings through enacting the recommendations of the first 2006 senior review process and/or implementing a second more drastic senior review before mid-decade."

Based on the FY2011 budget appropriation and the FY2012 budget request, the optimistic budget assumed in the Astro2010 recommendations is unlikely to materialize. Therefore, the Division of Astronomical Sciences (AST) is commencing a Portfolio Review process. Unlike the 2006 Senior Review, which considered only the future of AST-supported facilities, this review will encompass the entire portfolio of AST-supported facilities and programs. The goal of the review is to recommend to AST how support for existing facilities and programs should be prioritized and interleaved with new initiatives recommended by Astro2010.

A Portfolio Review Committee will be assembled during June and July 2011. Committee activities are expected to begin around the start of August 2011 and will lead to a report by the end of March 2012, which will be finalized by the end of June 2012.

The Committee will be asked to construct its recommendations in a 2-stage process: (1) to determine the critical capabilities needed to make progress on the science program articulated in Chapter 2 of Astro2010; and (2) to determine what combination of new facilities and programs plus existing -- but evolved -- facilities and programs will best deliver those capabilities within strict budgetary constraints.

This communiqué is being provided as a precursor to the Portfolio Review; no information or materials are being requested at the present time. The Committee will determine the nature and format of material that it wants to consider, and formal requests for facility input may be made during the course of the review. Any such material should be prepared in a form that directly supports the process outlined above. Because the Committee will be charged with focusing on future capabilities, it will not be basing its recommendations on quantitative measures of past productivity. The important consideration will be the potential for evolution toward capabilities essential for the Astro2010 science program, in ways that are achievable within realistic budgets. Current activity in key Astro2010 science areas will be relevant as well.

Facility staff, along with the entire astronomical community, will have opportunities to submit comments and suggestions to the Committee. The mechanism for doing so will be announced by Email and on the Portfolio Review web page, http://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/ast_portfolio_review.jsp, which will be updated regularly as the Review proceeds.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Vernon Pankonin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Vernon Pankonin
Deputy Director
Division of Astronomical Sciences

Cc: Facility Managing Organizations