

From the Astro2010 Chair
January 13, 2009

Colleagues:

The Long Beach meeting of the American Astronomical Society and the second meeting of the Astro2010 Survey Committee have just concluded. The Decadal Survey process is now in full swing! The survey committee is hard at work. In addition, the Science Frontier Panel chairs have just been appointed and the chairs of the Program Prioritization Panels and the Infrastructure Study Groups will follow soon. We expect to have the science panels and study groups populated by early February and the program panel soon thereafter.

We received much useful feedback from those present in Long Beach. Some of this concerned the organization of the survey and its timeline. We spent considerable time at our second survey committee meeting discussing those views and issues. To help minimize confusion we have added a "Frequently Asked Questions" to the (now re-organized) website <http://www.nationalacademies.org/Astro2010>. I will also be issuing these bulletins frequently to inform readers of recent and upcoming survey activities.

There are currently two calls for input to survey activities. The first, due by January 14, as previously announced, is for brief Notices of Interest to be completed by representatives of activities that are expecting to be prioritized. The notices will be used for survey planning purposes only. The second call, due by February 15, is for science white papers. Here, the intent is to help the Science Frontier Panels develop an exciting and scientifically compelling program organized around key questions and areas where we expect future discoveries to be made. Please address your submissions to specific panels and focus on the scientific opportunities. Do try to collaborate with your colleagues. It is the quality of the science, not the number of submissions that is of relevance here and you should aspire to make simple and clear statements that will help the panels and the survey committee write their reports.

Looking ahead, we anticipate that very shortly a call for policy position papers will issue from the Subcommittee on the State of the Profession. These will be due March 15 and we are looking for advice on how to handle endeavors such as generic technology development, theory, laboratory astrophysics, research funding, education, and any other area that cuts across subfields and observing facilities. In addition, in late February the Subcommittee on Programs will be issuing a Request for Information (RFI) on activities that will be considered in the program prioritization process. The RFIs will be due by April 1. Activities (missions, telescopes, laboratories, specific technology development programs, etc) from which further information is needed for the prioritization process will be invited to make more detailed submissions in a second round and then meet with the Program Panels in June. A major feature of these second round submissions will be the

assessment of the costs of construction and full operations, including the support of the science, and the identification of risk. We will be assisted by independent contractors and consultants in our assessment process.

Our ultimate goal for the Decadal Survey is to identify and justify the astronomical investigations that we expect to be most important over the next decade and beyond, and to recommend a prioritized and affordable program of new activities that can start within the next decade. We on the Astro2010 survey committee are striving to make this process as inclusive as we can and much of what we are doing reflects the advice we have received so far. In addition to submission of your best scientific and policy judgments and cleverest ideas for new observing capability, as outlined above, please think about organizing local “Town Hall” meetings over the next three months, to which you can invite survey committee members and colleagues in your region. Please use the astro2010@nas.edu email address to alert us to such meetings during their planning stages, so that we can arrange for survey committee members to attend where possible, and to send us any other comments on the survey process. Emails sent to this email address will be read and responded to as appropriate. Queries on process will be answered by the NRC staff and those inputs circulated to survey committee members will also be posted to the Astro2010 web site.

It's your survey. Get involved now and support it next year when our report will be released.

Sincerely,

Roger Blandford
Chair, Astro2010