

Astro2010 Chair Bulletin #7: May 22, 2009

Colleagues:

Astro2010 is still on schedule following a series of meetings held last week in Irvine. The five Science Frontier Panels studied the science white papers and identified key science questions and areas of potential discovery for the next decade. These questions and areas were discussed at the survey committee meeting in Irvine and following further interchanges over the next few weeks, the panels will be ready to start writing their independent reports. The six Infrastructure Study Groups have read the position papers and already amassed a very large quantity of information. These exercises should also be completed over the next few months. All of this represents an impressive amount of hard work and thought by nearly 160 astronomers who deserve our collective thanks.

Meanwhile the four Program Prioritization Panels have met and read the responses to the first Request for Information and the white papers on computation, laboratory astrophysics, technology development and theory. They have identified those activities from which they wish to solicit additional information, either in written form or in person during their upcoming Pasadena (CA) meetings that are co-located with the June meeting of the American Astronomical Society. Again, this is an outstanding achievement accomplished quickly and efficiently by another 60 panel members.

The survey committee itself meanwhile has been absorbing all of this input as well as the written reports from the 18 Astro2010 Town Halls that took place around the country, and educating itself about the full range of issues that are identified in its charge. The next major step is that some activities will be selected for assessment with respect to technological readiness and cost estimates by an independent contractor. This choice will be completed by the end of June and activities will be notified then. I must emphasize that the resources that we can apply to this exercise will be concentrated where the largest questions will have arisen. This is not a down-select and at this point no activities will have been excluded from further consideration. Looking forward, there are survey committee meetings planned for the October and December/January timeframes where the main recommendations will be discussed and decided, respectively. The final survey report should be submitted by April and, following NRC review, released during summer 2010.

There is a long interval from now till then and, while the survey input process has been relatively transparent up to this point, the modified FACA rules under which NRC committees operate result in all survey deliberations by the survey committee and the panels being confidential apart from open sessions at publicly announced meetings. I ask that you respect this process and not try to pressure your colleagues into divulging interim or final recommendations ahead of next summer. They have quite enough responsibility to handle.

Let me conclude by thanking all of you who have contributed or will contribute to Astro2010. It is abundantly clear that the nature and quality of its recommendations is being impacted strongly by the community at large and I believe that the reception of these recommendations will likewise be strengthened. This is expected to be important at a time when major changes in the leadership of the federal agencies and, indeed, in national science policy, are underway.

Have a great summer.

Roger Blandford  
Chair Astro2010