



Dear Colleague:

This is the sixth newsletter to the community regarding SolarSystem2012, the planetary science decadal survey. The key points in this newsletter are these:

1. The five decadal survey panels have completed their integration of the inputs from the community, and have provided their recommendations to the steering committee.
2. Cost and technical evaluations for the highest priority missions recommended by the panels are nearing completion.
3. Final prioritization of mission candidates and other activities by the steering committee is underway, and will be completed within the next few weeks.
4. A report is being drafted, and we expect it to begin a comprehensive peer review process beginning in late September.
5. We hope to have a final report ready to present to the community by next spring.
6. More information is available on the SolarSystem2012 web site:
http://sites.nationalacademies.org/SSB/CurrentProjects/ssb_052412

Late spring and early summer were an exceptionally busy time for the five panels, as they finished working through all of the inputs from the community, integrating them for inclusion in the final decadal survey report. The statistics on the community inputs were impressive, with 199 white papers written by 1691 unique authors and co-authors. The panels also worked closely over this period with the Applied Physics Laboratory, Goddard Space Flight Center, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory to perform detailed studies of a large number of candidate missions that arose from the community inputs.

After receiving the mission studies from the panels, Aerospace Corporation, under contract to the NRC, has performed a number of detailed cost and technical evaluations of the candidate missions. Most of these evaluations are now done, and the final few will be completed within the next two weeks.

Once the steering committee has received all of the scientific inputs from the

panels and all of the technical and cost evaluations from Aerospace, the final prioritization of mission candidates will take place. The challenge, of course, is finding the best solar system exploration program that fits the projected budget. Much of the prioritization has already been done by the panels themselves, so the number of decisions that the steering group will have to make is small. As always, our decisions will be driven by our assessment of the community's views on the science value and cost effectiveness of all the missions and other activities under consideration. The final prioritization will be completed within the next few weeks.

A report summarizing the current state of knowledge in planetary science, the key outstanding science questions, and the affordable mission candidates and other science activities that best address those questions is being drafted. Most of the report is now written, and we expect to have a final draft done within the next two months. Once that draft has been submitted to the NRC, it will undergo a long and rigorous peer review process, per NRC standards. Many of you in the community will be asked to review it; if you do get asked to provide a review, a timely response will be greatly appreciated!

As soon as the report has been through the review and revision process, it will be released publicly. We expect that the release date will be sometime in the early spring of 2011. After the report has been released, we will also be able to provide briefings about it to the community at major science conferences... so stay tuned for those.

I'd again like to thank everyone in the community for your many inputs to this process. The set of activities that we have studied is breathtaking in its scope, and finding the subset that best addresses your highest priorities while fitting into a limited budget is turning out to be both challenging and rewarding. I'm excited about the recommended plan that is emerging, and I think you will be too.

As always, more details, including archived webcasts of meetings, agendas for past and future meetings, and materials presented to the Steering Group and panels, are available at the SolarSystem2012 web site:

http://sites.nationalacademies.org/SSB/CurrentProjects/ssb_052412

Best wishes,

Steve Squyres

SolarSystem2012 Chair