National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001

February 23, 2011

Dr. Kenneth Ford
Chairman
NASA Advisory Council
Washington, DC 20546

Dear ~~Dr.~~ Ken Ford:

Enclosed is NASA's response to a recommendation from the NASA Advisory Council meeting held on April 28-29, 2010, at the Johnson Space Center. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Council would like further background on the information provided in the enclosure. I appreciate the Council's thoughtful consideration of these issues and welcome its continued observations, recommendations, and advice concerning the U.S. civil space program.

I look forward to working closely with you and the members of the Council in the future.

Sincerely,

Charles F. Bolden, Jr.
Administrator

Enclosure:
NAC 2010-02-05 (EPOC-01) Public Engagement Not a "Mission Requirement"

Tracking Number: 2010-02-05 (EPOC-01)
Public Engagement Not a "Mission Requirement"

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation:
The Council recommends that representatives of the NASA Communications and Education Offices be included in reviews during all phases of development to ensure that missions serve NASA's educational and public outreach goals.

Major Reasons for the Recommendation:
NASA is an organization of engineers and scientists who do not necessarily understand the importance of public outreach. Public Affairs continues to fight a needless battle to include public access and interaction as a requirement for every NASA mission. Engineers have always resisted including cameras and crew time as a priority mission requirement, as both require the expenditure of scarce resources. Public access to missions should always be a priority requirement that is built into the design of any mission.

NASA Response:
The Agency concurs with the recommendation that the Office of Education and the Office of Communications be represented at the initiation of new NASA programs. We recognize that there is a need to be more proactive in the public engagement aspect of NASA's mission development and execution. There is a desire among the Agency's professional communicators to initiate a cultural transition from one that treats public engagement and educations as an "after-event" activity to one that recognizes, up front, the value of planning for and dedicating resources to communication efforts to complement the technical and scientific objectives of mission development. This further aligns with administrative directives for more open Government and with Congressional interest to improve opportunities for public engagement.

Over a number of years, public opinion research has revealed that, while NASA enjoys broad support from the American people, public understanding of specific Agency activities is minimal. Progress in improving this situation can be improved by adopting the NAC's recommendation to consider public engagement as a priority or "Level 1 Requirement" in the development, management, and execution of individual projects and programs.

The Office of Education and the Office of Communications will work through their respective coordinating committees to develop appropriate guiding NASA policy and program management directives to ensure these activities are institutionalized to the broadest extent possible.