National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Office of the Administrator
Washington, DC 20546-0001

February 21, 2014

Dr. Steven W. Squyres
Chairman
NASA Advisory Council
Washington, DC 20546

STEVE

Dear ~~Dr. Squyres~~:

Enclosed is NASA's response to a recommendation from the NASA Advisory Council meeting held on December 11-12, 2013, at Kennedy Space Center, Florida. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Council would like further background on this response. I appreciate the Council's thoughtful consideration leading to the recommendations and welcome its continued findings, recommendations, and advice concerning the U.S. civil space program.

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

Sincerely,

Charles F. Bolden, Jr.
Administrator

Enclosure:
2013-03-01 (SC-01) Impact of Travel Restrictions on Science and Technology

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation

Impact of Travel Restrictions on Science and Technology
2013-03-01 (SC-01)

Recommendation:
The Council recommends that the NASA leadership reconsider the interpretation of external guidance on travel restrictions for scientific and technology meetings, conferences and working groups to allow the optimal participation of the scientific and technology community, including NASA employees and contractors, to enhance productivity within the existing highly constrained financial resources.

Major Reasons for Proposing the Recommendation:
Under the current interpretation, travel under NASA contracts, grants, or as NASA employees and contractors has been limited in a way that is highly inefficient and counterproductive for NASA's science and technology endeavors. This is compounded by the additional burden of new justification, documentation, tracking and management requirements and their associated costs.

Regular and open communication between scientists and technologists is essential for healthy and productive research. Although electronic and virtual means of communication play an increasing role in interacting with colleagues and can accommodate much routine project activity, they cannot replace face-to-face interactions. Specific examples include the much valued give-and-take of vibrant (sometimes heated) discussions, insight derived from multiple ideas being discussed spontaneously, informal (often unplanned) interactions and brainstorming that occurs before or after a presentation. These person-to-person contacts are extremely cost-effective and are key components in productive scientific interactions.

Consequences of No Action on the Proposed Recommendation:
NASA will spend more money while achieving less in science and technology by running the program in a way that is inefficient for discovery and progress.

NASA Response:
NASA concurs with NAC recommendation 2013-03-01 (SC-01). In response to OMB's memorandum M-12-12, NASA issued sequestration guidance in March of 2013 in a number of areas, including conference attendance and travel. Since that time, the Agency has adjusted to lower funding levels (post-sequestration) and, as a result, the NASA Executive Council reassessed and issued new guidance for FY 2014 in regard to conference attendance and travel. This new guidance for FY 2014 removed the requirement to be substantively involved when attending a domestic conference. For foreign conferences, the requirement to be programmatically involved was reduced to being substantively involved (i.e., presenting, speaking, session moderator, or facilitating a scientific or technical exhibit). It is important to note that the reduction in the number of conferences NASA has participated in under sequestration has been insignificant, although the number of attendees for each event has been measurably reduced. The new relaxed guidance for FY 2014, in most cases, has resulted in

significant increases in the number of attendees. This demonstrates that NASA has reconsidered restrictions for scientific and technology events allowing for increased participation which is consistent with the NAC recommendation.