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Agency-Wide Plan for NASA's Most Critical Facilities

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation:

During the review of the Aeronautics Test Program (ATP), the Aeronautics Committee noted a decreasing utilization trend of ATP facilities that if left unabated will result in an increasing budget shortfall affecting the operations of these facilities. The Council recommends that an Agency-wide plan be developed to stabilize and where possible reverse the situation including supporting and improving the technical capabilities and operations of the most critical facilities and de-accessioning some facilities through sale or gifts.

Major Reasons for the Recommendation:

The utilization data for the ATP facilities shows a continued downward trend due to many factors including decreasing program usage, competition from abroad, and increasing use of analytical methods. If left unabated, this trend represents a "going out of business" approach for the ATP facilities. The cost gap is increasingly difficult to close and could result in shrinking capabilities of the facilities and severely constraining NASA's ability to do experimental research. While analytical methods can provide valuable results, the Aeronautics Committee feels that analysis via computational fluid dynamics is not a sufficient replacement. Additionally, some of these facilities will be essential for future national air and space priorities. There have been numerous studies looking at this problem, including the recent strategic planning done by ATP. Based on that, a plan adopted by NASA as a whole would be very helpful in setting priorities for investment of resources as well as for exploring the transfer of other facilities to the private or non-profit sector to maintain and develop.

NASA Response:

NASA concurs with the recommendation to develop an Agency-wide plan to address its technical capabilities. Consistent with the Administration's national policy, NASA has already initiated plans to ensure that its technical capabilities are available and effectively sized in order to support current and future NASA missions. The NASA Technical Capability (NTC) process will provide an integrated assessment of the "supply" of technical capabilities across all NASA Centers and an integrated analysis of the "demand" for technical capabilities across all NASA programs, involving all internal NASA stakeholders. This activity will be incorporated into NASA's annual budget process and be reflected in its Agency-wide facilities master plan. The Mission Support Directorate (MSD) is developing an institutional strategy that addresses institutional implementation requirements over the master-planning horizon and that is consistent with the NASA Strategic Plan. MSD is nearing completion of the first step in this process which is updating and integrating the Center master plans.

Enclosure