

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation

Citizen Engagement 2013-02-09 (EPOC-03)

Recommendation:

NASA plays a unique role in the inspiration and education of the public about programs in space, and has a stellar track record in this area. While the Council acknowledges that efficiencies may be gained through consolidation, the Council remains concerned with the proposed transfer of responsibility for outreach associated with NASA space missions to agencies and organizations with no spaceflight experience. NASA should ensure that funding remains in place for public outreach associated with NASA's missions.

Major Reasons for Proposing the Recommendation:

NASA, by virtue of its missions, currently plays a unique role in engaging the public in space exploration and exposing them to science and technology. These activities take place outside of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities which are being consolidated under the FY 2014 reorganization.

Consequences of No Action on the Proposed Recommendation:

A unique and important capability to engage and inspire the public outside of the traditional education system will be lost.

NASA Response:

NASA partially concurs with this recommendation. In May 2013, the National Science and Technology Council's Committee on STEM Education (CoSTEM) released a strategic plan for Federal investments in STEM education which can be viewed at:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/stem_stratplan_2013.pdf.

The plan calls for increased coordination among Federal agencies on five major priorities:

- Improve STEM instruction.
- Increase and sustain youth and public engagement in STEM.
- Enhance STEM experiences of undergraduate students.
- Better serve groups historically underrepresented in STEM fields.
- Design graduate education for tomorrow's STEM workforce.

To achieve these goals, the Administration developed a strategy for its FY 2014 President's Budget Request, which consolidates many education and public outreach activities and investments at the National Science Foundation, Department of Education, and the Smithsonian Institution. NASA will work closely with these three agencies and under further guidance the Agency receives through the FY 2014 appropriations process.

NASA has developed strong working relationships with the three agencies and is working closely with them as they develop implementation plans. NASA will bring its vast experience, as well as the people, resources, and facilities under its control into the Federal approach to STEM, and will ensure that its content is actively integrated into the Federal strategy.

NASA still has extensive education and outreach efforts that it will implement, including relationships with the National Space Grant consortia and through its Minority University Research and Education Project. Additionally, the Science Mission Directorate is revising its policy directives to ensure education and outreach activities funded by missions in FY 2014 are designed to inspire and engage students and the public, while still aligned with the Administration and the CoSTEM consolidation efforts.