

NASA Advisory Council Recommendation

Science Mission Directorate Performance Under the COVID-19 Environment 2022-02-05

Name of Committee: Science Committee

Chair of Committee: Dr. Ellen Williams

Date of Council Public Deliberation: August 10, 2022

Short Title of Recommendation: Science Mission Directorate
Performance under the COVID-19
Environment

Recommendation:

NASA should carry out a strategic evaluation of the Future of Work challenges following the major disruptions of COVID-19, in particular how they may affect retention, career development, and delivery of its various missions in the future, and how best to leverage a hybrid future that embraces the distributed nature of the science community.

Major Reasons for the Recommendation:

The NASA workforce has done an exceptional job executing its mission under the extraordinary challenges of the COVID-19 environment. There will be continuing challenges over the next few years in establishing the new normal balance of off-site and on-site work activity (Future of Work). The successful launch and deployment of the James Webb Space Telescope is a remarkable accomplishment under any conditions, and especially laudatory given the challenges of COVID-19. The demonstration of commitment and technical skill required to accomplish this mission will inspire future technologically challenging missions to succeed.

Consequences of No Action on the Recommendation:

If this matter is not strategically addressed, one possible consequence is that gains made in increasing cognitive diversity at NASA may be lost. For instance, some women or employees from low-income families might have a less effective work environment at home due to taking on additional domestic or family-support duties at the cost of scientific career opportunities, or alternatively might need additional flexibility in hybrid work to maintain an effective work/family balance.

NASA Response:

NASA concurs with this recommendation. We feel there might be two evaluations requested here: (1) a strategic evaluation of the Future of Work challenges following the major disruptions of COVID-19, in particular how they may affect retention, career development, and delivery of its various missions in the future; and (2) how best to leverage a hybrid future that embraces

the distributed nature of the science community. This request for strategic evaluations on the impact of COVID-19 and hybrid Future of Work environment on the science community is of interest not only to NASA, but the rest of the U.S. Government. As such, we feel the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) would be the ideal organization to conduct these studies. We propose to inquire with NASEM within the next 30 days to see if any other part of the U.S. Government has already requested similar studies. If NASEM is already evaluating these strategic topics, we will use the results of work under way to influence our future plans. If NASEM is not already evaluating these strategic topics, we will work to get a study task in place within the next three months.