



GIANT MAGELLAN TELESCOPE

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The GMT and the NSF Funding Opportunity: An Explanation for our Astronomical Colleagues

As many of you know, the NSF Astronomy Division recently created an opportunity for funding entitled “Planning a Partnership Model for a Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope” that offered the possibility of one award of \$250,000 per year for 5 years to “refine the roles of NSF and the community in project development, engage in planning science and engineering operations, prepare for potential future Federal funding opportunities after the start of the next decade.” The GMT Board has decided to carry forward our efforts to engage the U.S. astronomical community in other ways: we will not be submitting a response to this solicitation.

The GMT is surging ahead. The Project Office in Pasadena has assembled a vigorous staff that has produced an elegant design and we are aiming for a Preliminary Design Review in a year. After the PDR, the Board will make a decision on the construction schedule. A recent \$25 million donation from George Mitchell and The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation has set a standard for philanthropic fundraising and our international partners, Australia and South Korea, have led the way in providing financial support. To date, approximately \$300 million, or nearly half of the total cost, has been pledged to the GMT.

Optical polishing of the first of the seven 8.4 meter primary mirror segments is meeting specification, retiring the greatest technical risk to the project. A second mirror was cast in January 2012, and we have ordered the glass for a third mirror. We have begun blasting the site at Las Campanas, Chile. The many scientific areas where the 2010 Decadal Review could foresee great impact by the GMT—including the evolution of the universe and the study of planets around other stars in the Milky Way—are burgeoning.

We propose an alternative path that will engage the U.S. community in the GMT in the years before NSF is ready to take significant actions. We want to demonstrate to the NSF, to the US community, and to potential international partners that we are open to their participation and seek to align our actions with their goals.

We already have a community representative on our Scientific Advisory Committee to help shape the technical and scientific program for the GMT. We had valuable external members on our Instrument Development Advisory Panel to recommend an instrumentation roadmap. We will do more. We will use our own GMT funding, at the \$250,000 scale proposed by the NSF, to enlist the participation of the broad and deep U.S. community.

We will actively explore all the channels by which the NSF could eventually participate in GMT through instrumentation funding and facility operations. We will actively seek additional major partners from among US institutions and we will help other institutions form consortia if they are too small to contemplate individual partnership.

For institutions that are considering joining GMT, we will find ways to gain from

their input on instrumentation and other technical issues at an early stage. We will seek to enhance the intellectual partnership that the GMT provides by sponsoring a series of open conferences and workshops to engage the next generation of international research leaders to provide visions of how GMT will change their field.

We deeply appreciate the \$10 million funding we have already received from the NSF through AURA. We look forward to a time when NSF will have the resources to help the U.S. astronomical community operate and use the Giant Magellan Telescope. In the meantime, we believe we can serve that end best by taking these actions with our own resources.

The GMTO Board
2 April 2012