



Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy

Dr. James Ulvestad
Director, Division of Astronomical Sciences
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

November 2, 2012

Dear Dr. Ulvestad,

On August 22 AURA provided an initial response to the Portfolio Review. Following your meetings with AURA observatory directors to discuss elements of the Portfolio Review, and a thorough discussion by the AURA Board, we now provide a more detailed response to address specific implementation issues. The AURA Board of Directors includes community leaders representative of a broad range of interests in optical/infrared and solar astronomy.

AURA seeks a balanced program that includes a forward-looking, aggressive effort to create cutting-edge observing facilities, a well-defined role for our observatories that enables them to be community leaders, and a robust individual grants program.

We regard the Portfolio Review as an effort to balance these same factors. The implementation of these recommendations is a crucial responsibility of the NSF. It should build on the Portfolio Review, but also include input from the established advisory committees and other forms of community feedback from stakeholders.

Our response is intended to optimize the success of the Portfolio Review. The NSF implementation will drive fundamental changes to the US public astronomy and the relationship between the community and its observing facilities. This relationship has taken decades to develop and changes should be undertaken with caution. While we understand the need to move with deliberation, our response lays out the case for a pace that is based on our, and the community's, ability to change, so as to minimize the damage. We have already begun soliciting ideas and expressions of interest from the community on the facilities and programs to be divested. We do not believe it is possible or prudent to attempt to reach a full understanding of the issues by the end of 2013.

Our response also addresses the fundamental roles of our national observatories: to directly provide observing facilities, facilitate broader access to other facilities, and provide leadership in accomplishing community goals. These important functions should not be adversely impacted by the implementation. Indeed, this is an important opportunity to strengthen these roles.

We look forward to working with you to achieve the recommendations in our response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William S. Smith, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial 'W' and a long, sweeping underline.

William S. Smith, Jr.
President