

The SIRTf Users Panel met at the SSC in Pasadena on November 4 and 5, 2002. The agenda of presentations and discussions is attached (NB: SSC will attach in the Web version of the report).

SUP was impressed by progress made over the past 6 months in many areas, the enormous dedication and enthusiasm of the scientific and technical staff, and the high quality of the presentations -- particularly in view of the intense level of activity just prior to launch.

Management and staff deserve kudos for their efforts.

I. GO Cycle 1 Issues

The SUP reviewed procedures for CY-1 proposal submission, review and award. SUP recommends to SSC that

(1) GOs awarded CY-1 time in all cases be required to affirm that their approved AOR's accomplish the science program which they proposed and are suitable to schedule as originally submitted. Time between award notification and receipt of affirmation should be sufficient to enable reply following careful review. It is expected that the SSC will impose a deadline for this affirmation, and that no response by the deadline will be taken as affirmation.

(2) provide a template form to successful GO-1 applicants which would be used in cases where the GO determines that he/she must request a change in their originally proposed AORs (e.g. due to changes in instrument or spacecraft performance, or coordinate or integration time errors). The SSC template would provide the mechanism for standardizing such requests, and insuring that the proper information is provided to the SSC in a way that can be quickly digested and reviewed. The intent of this recommendation is NOT to encourage program tweaking, but rather to minimize the number of failed/inadequate observations.

We are pleased to note that SSC management recognizes the enormous potential benefit of early release of FLS and EROs to the preparation of GO CY-1 proposals. We encourage their efforts to maximize the data released to the community -- not only through the archive, but via other, more ad hoc mechanisms.

II. Funding Issues

SUP heard presentations from SSC management regarding procedures for award and distribution of funds to GOs. The procedures described envision awards more akin to grants than the formal JPL contracts heretofore envisioned as the mechanism for distributing funds to the community. SUP also learned that awards will be made algorithmically, rather than via review of individual budgets by SSC personnel.

SUP wishes to compliment SSC for its proactive work to develop more efficient procedures for transferring funds to PIs. We encourage SUP to explore mechanisms to extend these efficiencies beyond university-based PIs to those at government and/or national laboratories, etc.

We also encourage SSC to develop -- within the proposed award context -- mechanisms that provide funding matched to program complexity and other concerns. We recommend that algorithms for funding GO proposals be reviewed by an external committee, and that after the fact reviews be held periodically in service of fine-tuning funding algorithms. We also recommend that a general review, preferably by the SUP, be held as a retrospective on the entire CY-1 process once final decisions and allocations have been made in order to include community participation in suggesting changes for CY-2.

III. Scope of 100 day review

SSC management plans to review the performance of SIRTf and its instrument complement 100 days following launch. The review will be carried out by an external committee on which SUP will be represented by its chair. The committee will recommend to SSC management changes in SIRTf operations that might be dictated by on-orbit performance.

SUP is strongly supportive of the proposed "100 day review" to develop an assessment of spacecraft and instrument performance and efficiency. We would like to encourage SSC management to incorporate in this process reviews of (1) efficiency of scheduling (e.g. minimizing the number of 'gaps' in spacecraft scheduling) (2) allocation of resources at SSC, specifically the balance between short-term needs and support of post-BCD processing and archives. This would, we believe, provide an explicit context for eliciting community input in balancing short-term requirements vs long-term needs.

SUP also strongly encourages early release of the results of the 100 day review to the community.

IV. Resource allocation at SSC -- long term issues

SUP urges SSC to prepare a long-term assessment of resource allocation at the Center in service of developing a clear understanding of (1) adequacy of resources to meet the basic mission of maximizing science return from SIRTf; (2) the load on SSC staff. We reiterate our strong belief that the success of the SSC in meeting its mission requires a strong, scientifically engaged staff. SUP wishes to review an assessment of long-term resource allocation at its next meeting -- virtual or in person. This assessment should be in context of the retrospective on the CY-1 process and plans for where SSC goes from there.

On the short-term, the SSC management should continue to encourage its staff to become involved in existing/new SIRTf observing programs as far as is permitted by the top priority needs to launch and render SIRTf operational.

V. Archive data mining tools

SUP is pleased with the progress since SUP 10 in development of archive data mining tools, and the development of the PET tool.

VI. Response to SUP reports

SSC has consistently provided excellent feedback to SUP recommendations, both via reports at SUP meetings and interactions between SSC management and the SUP chair.

The SUP would like to recommend a fine-tuning of the response process: posting SSC responses to recommendations on a timescale (e.g. one month) following receipt of the SUP report - thus providing a traceable link between recommendations and actions.

VII. Presentations

SUP reiterates its thanks to SSC for arranging presentations of high quality. We are particularly grateful for the effort invested in preparing for this meeting - held during a period of maximum stress for SSC staff.

In a few cases -- for example, discussion of progress on software -- SUP interactions with SSC would have benefited from a more top level review of issues, rather than an acronym-dense 'snapshot' of rapidly evolving processes.