

To the Mars Community,

At a townhall meeting at LPSC on Wednesday, March 25, Dr. Steve Squyres was introduced as the chair of the coming Decadal Survey and he led a townhall discussion on what, why, and how of this activity. The presentation materials used by Steve and David Smith (of the NRC) have been posted on the NRC web site at the following location: http://www7.nationalacademies.org/ssb/SSEdecadal2011_Squyres.pdf.

A significant part of the discussion at the townhall meeting related to the kinds of inputs the Decadal Survey panels need or could benefit from to achieve their purpose, and the timing required in order for those inputs to be useful. As stated on Slide #9 of the presentation cited above, "broad community input is a defining feature of a decadal survey". For Mars, we can see two classes of written inputs to the process: 1). White papers prepared by MEPAG on behalf of the entire community, and 2). White papers prepared by subsets of the Mars community on topical areas of interest.

MEPAG White Papers

Our current plans are to prepare the following list of white papers on behalf of MEPAG. Drafts will be circulated to the community in July, they will be discussed at the next MEPAG meeting (July 29-30, 2009; all members of the community welcome to attend), they will be revised as needed, and then they will be submitted to the NRC. Depending how things evolve, we may need to launch additional white paper activity.

1. Mars Science Goals, Objectives, Investigations, and Priorities: 2009. The 2008 version of this document already exists; it needs minor tweaking in the area of methane, and if possible, an update to Goal IV (input to Task #3 in NRC Statement of Task).
2. High-level summary of the 2009 state of knowledge in Mars science and the formulation of the top Mars-related science objectives for the next decade. (input to Tasks #2, 3 in NRC Statement of Task).
3. The importance of a program of strategically linked, partially interdependent missions to achieve the top science objectives for Mars exploration (input to Task #4 in NRC Statement of Task).
4. Strategic technology development needs/ opportunities for future Mars exploration (input to Task #5 in NRC Statement of Task).
5. 2018 science and mission definition (MRR-SAG) (input to Task #6 in NRC Statement of Task).

Topical White Papers

In addition to the above broad programmatic documents, the NRC is also interested in input on topical science areas. Self-organized science teams are welcome to provide input related to the current state of knowledge (NRC's task #2), scientific questions (NRC's task #3), and the science goals achievable by small spacecraft (NRC's task #8), and anything else within the decadal survey's charter. Dr. Squyres told the LPSC audience that the broader the authorship of the white paper inputs to the Decadal Survey process, the more credibility they are likely to be assumed to have. Although these white paper authorship teams need to be bottoms-up, rather than coordinated by MEPAG, we can perhaps help by letting the community know which topics are in progress, so as to help individual scientists find appropriate places to get engaged. To this end, I encourage you to keep me informed if you are currently (or plan to) organize a white paper team, and we can circulate the list periodically. The MEPAG Executive Committee will do what it can to help the community make connections, so that our collective impact is optimized. So far, I am aware of four planned white papers of this type:

- Astrobiology (to be coordinated by NAI)
- Mars Polar Science
- Mars Atmospheric Science
- Mars landing site characterization and selection

The MEPAG website is developing a page to make all this activity available on the web. This should be up in a few days at <http://mepag.jpl.nasa.gov/decadal>.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jack Mustard, MEPAG Chair