



National Science Foundation

4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

May 12, 2004

Dr. Jeremy Mould, Director
National Optical Astronomy Observatory
950 North Cherry Avenue
Tucson, AZ 85719

Dear Jeremy:

As you are aware, the most recent decadal survey of the NRC's Astronomy and Astrophysics Survey Committee, "Astronomy and Astrophysics in the New Millennium," recommends an ambitious set of ground-based optical and infrared observing facilities to be aggressively pursued during this decade with funding coming, in part, from the National Science Foundation. The list of facilities is long and their projected costs are high. Given the realities of differences in the level of maturity of the various projects and refinements of their scientific goals and projected schedules and costs when confronted with projections for the NSF's budget, it is clear to the Division of Astronomical Sciences that additional mid- and long-range planning is required by NSF to understand how best to address these recommendations. Given the lead times for technology development prerequisite to a number of these projects and their complexity and cost, the 'look-out' time for such a plan should be 20-25 years.

According to Article 3-A-6 of SPO-1 of the current cooperative agreement between AURA and NSF governing NOAO Management, Operations and Maintenance of NOAO, NOAO should "Lead community-based planning, design and development efforts for proposed new federally-funded initiatives in ground-based optical and infrared astronomy..." Given this charge, a planning effort for the Decadal Survey optical/infrared initiatives with broad community involvement is within NOAO's purview. Accordingly, I am writing to ask your opinion on how such a process might be conducted and specifically how NOAO could help to facilitate it. Specific issues that are of importance are:

- Show how present investments relate to future initiatives;
- illustrate convergence paths;
- lay the basis for disinvestment of existing facilities;
- suggest budget strategies and priorities;
- address community structural change.

I realize that, should we decide to initiate such a process, the associated costs would not be negligible. Since it is not a part of the NOAO Program Plan, support for such a process could only follow a successful proposal and would be funded through a new SPO.

Sincerely yours,

Craig Foltz
Program Manager, NOAO

cc: Dr. William Smith