

Astrobiology Task Force Report

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Results of Recent Task Force Meeting

- Semi Annual Meeting held at NASA HQ on April 30 & May 1, 2001
- Presentations on NAI, Mars and Europa, new NAI consortium members, grants program, new organization at HQ, etc.
- Overall, ABTF is very satisfied with NASA's role in forging this new field!

Code S Re-Organization and NAI Review

- New Code S Organization shifts responsibility for astrobiology from Astrophysics ? Solar System Exploration
 - Since Origins goals have strong astrobiology component, it is important to maintain a link to the astrobiology program.
 - Anne Kinney may want to add an astrobiology representative to Origins subcommittee
- NAI review
 - NASA Chief Scientist has agreed to empanel a visiting committee to review NAI on 3~5 year intervals. A strong, internationally recognized biologist should chair committee

NAI Leadership

- Barry Blumberg's move to Washington has had numerous positive ramifications for advancing goals of biology and astrobiology within the agency.
- However, in the long term, the NAI needs a strong, highly credible leader (at Ames) if NAI is to fulfill its promise as the world leader in astrobiology research.
- Code S and the Chief Scientist's Office should closely monitor this situation given the present uncertainty over the top leadership within NASA

NSCORTS Program

- NSCORTS provides valuable educational opportunities in astrobiology, with programs presently at La Jolla and Rochester.
- It may be appropriate to continue this program under the umbrella of NAI with a suitably worded call for new NAI members

Research in Space Analogs

- Strong endorsement for research into extreme terrestrial environments as analogs for other planets
 - Real world application of theories, tools, techniques
 - Rapid turnaround with results for graduate student and postdocs well in advance of space missions
- While NASA's role is limited, but vital
 - Initiate ASTEP program within NASA Code S
 - Pursue collaborations with NSF (LExEn) and other agencies (Polar programs, Dept of Agriculture, USGS, NIH)

SSE Programs

- Mars and Europa
 - Task leaders and participating scientists satisfied with level of involvement by (astro)biologists in establishing mission goals.
 - Desire for more involvement by biologists on higher level committees, e.g. OS and SSAC
- Draft SSE goals have strong astrobiology focus
 - Concern that overlap with Origins goals could confuse policy makers