AAAC Demographics Committee Teleconference

Minutes for Oct. 3, 2014

Attending:

Pricilla Cushman (AAAC Chair)

Jim Buckley (AAAC Secretary)

Jim Whitmore

Brad Peterson

Angela Olinto

James Lowenthal

Glen Wahlgren

Maria Womack

Dan Evans

Todd Hoeksema

Arik Posner

Jonathan Rall

Prisca began the call by describing past work, as summarized on the wikipage. She pointed out the list of questions, and suggested that the three possible solutions for the poor success rate of proposals could serve to organize contributions from the AAAC committee members and agencies. As an end result of the meeting, we would correct the list of agency contacts and committee members responsible for various work items.

Prisca summarized the status of input from various agencies. NSF/AST has provided detailed input in a form that is very close to what is ultimately needed to proceed. Prisca recently communicated with Kathy Turner, who provided feedback on what types of data might be provided (these are reflected in the wikipage by listing DOE in parentheses following each question).

Linda Sparke (NASA Astrophysics), Jonathan Rall (NASA Planetary) and Arik Posner (NASA Heliophysics) took issue with the mission statement. In their divisions, there is no change in funds available for individual researchers or smaller projects, and success rates have not changed dramatically. Following this observation, there was some discussion to update the mission statement. There was also a discussion about the usefulness of first obtaining data from the various agencies before addressing the solutions, although having the solutions on a separate wiki page would be useful as an organizing principle in the future.

Jim Witmore advised the committee to look at the HEPAP presentation by Denise Caldwell, showing, for example, the current budget fraction of 57% for individual grants, and the commitment of NSF MPS to keep this percentage above 55% . Jim pointed out some nuances of the statistics, e.g., the similarity of NSF/PHY to DOE in that acceptance rates for long-term programs (e.g., HEP, accelerators) may appear higher since these are ongoing commitments. Jim B. (quoting Denise at the HEPAP presentation) and Jim W. pointed out the difference in culture of NSF/PHYS, in that the NSF is an investigation-driven (not project/mission driven) agency with support for a mix of both long term projects, and smaller programs.

Angela Olinto discussed her original interest in addressing the issue of “free energy” which she identified with the recommendations for midscale funding in the NWNH decadal survy. She pointed out that this might be more difficult for mission/project-oriented agencies and that our committee is now really now focusing on the demographics side of the question, rather that a focus on midscale funding.

More discussion about the mission statement for the Demographics committee took place. Several argued that it was difficult to start to a discussion of “solutions” before we understood the data. Prisca pointed out that the real goal was to be somewhat agnostic, ask correct questions to lead to better understanding. She pointed out that one of the goals of this committee is to underscore differences in culture between different agencies.

\*We agreed that one key point for our deliberations is that DOE, and to some extent NSF/PHY-HEP, places an emphasis on mission/project relevance and need to honor long term large projects will have an impact on statistics (e.g., proposal success rates)

\*Linda offered up another possible “solution” to low proposal rates, by having NASA narrow it’s focus on individual research grants to be tied to particular missions (like DOE).

Prisca further discussed input from Kathy Turner on possible data from DOE. Kathy pointed out that DOE annually surveys its HEP university PIs for a summary of breakdown of FTE numbers by job classification, providing some overall demographics.

DOE also stated the obvious - that as funding decreases we expect decrease in funding for all programs (individual research grant and projects). Jim B. pointed out that this could be seen in the HEPAP slides presented by Jim Siegrist at the September, 2014 HEPAP meeting (earlier that week). These slides showed similar slight downward trends in University and lab/project funding, quantifying Kathy’s observation that all budgets shrink.

Kathy Turner pointed out that while DOE does have an individual investigator program, researches are expected to be in a collaboration working on a list of DOE approved projects (i.e., those passing the first part of a CD review process). Kathy also said that DOE is beginning to see individuals listed on more than one proposal.

Once again, the discussion returned to the possible misstatement of the mission statement for the Demographics committee. Angela pointed out that the NSF also reports a very high success rate for proposals to the grants program (as explained in part by Jim W.’s comments on support for long-term programs).

Brad Peterson proposed a different approach. He suggested that from the starting point that we live in a fixed-budget environment, we should ask if we making optical use of resources. His point of view (similar to the perception of others on the committee) is that perhaps too much of the budget goes to facilities, not enough on people.

Angela, pointing to the NSF MPS model, pointed to a potential “solution” in the form of a hard boundary between facilities and individual researches.

Jim B., Angela O and Jim W. pointed out guiding principle for NSF/MSP as stated by

Denise Caldwell at HEPAP meeting, e.g., – is that currently 57% goes to researches (not facilities) and this number should never go below 55%.

Prisca said that the call should focus on going through requests for specific data (the list of questions) and identifying names of individuals responsible for collecting the data.

This resulted in some additional warnings from agency representatives.

Linda pointed out that since some of the data might be quite time consuming for the agencies to provide, it is important that we first make an effort to make sure we are asking for correct data. Others warned that some demographical data may not even be available from some Agencies/divisions (e.g., age not available from NASA, maybe Ph.D. age).

Prisca once again stood by a two-stage approach – to first refine questions and collect data, then address possible solutions. The agencies should just say which ones are hard and which ones are easy the way that DOE did on the questions. She urged the committee to at least collect names of AAAC members and Agency representatives to be assigned (volunteer) to work on different questions. For each topic, the responsible coordinators would edit the wiki page, adding resources (e.g., web links), collect information, and post slides or answers from agencies.

There was only a brief discussion of the list of questions on the wiki page, given the limited time remaining. Jim B pointed out that if one possible solution to the low proposal acceptance rate was to offer RFPs/FOAs less frequently, we should first get statistics on the proposal announcements and frequency over past years.

Prisca pointed out that we had agreed that the time base for statistics would be 10 years.

Prisca encouraged contributions to the wikipage to get additional input from the committee to make sure that we have a complete set of questions. This input should be provided soon (before the next meeting in two weeks). She urged the committee to focus on the big picture, not to make small edits on language. To get things started, Prisca will edit the wiki page and come up with a strawman proposal for division of effort and assignment of responsibilities.

In going through the questions, a few items were added (at end of these memos, see comments in red added to the list of questions on the wiki).

Finally, we determined who on the committee would be the point person for gathering the data from each agency. The committee members are shown below and the name in parenthesis is the agency contact. Since there was no obvious match on the committee for Planetary, Angela will call Geoff Marcy and see if he might join.

NASA Astrophysics contact: Brad Peterson (Glen Walghren)

NASA Helio: Todd Hoeksema (Arik Posner)

NASA Planetary: Jim Buckley (Jonathan Rall)

DOE: Prisca Cushman (Kathy Turner and John Boger)

NSF/AST: James Lowenthal (Jim Ulvestadt, Dan Evans)

NSF/PHY: Angela Olinto (Jim Whitmore)

The next meeting should occur in approximately 2 weeks. Prisca will start a doodle poll.

-JB

Excerpt from Wiki page with a few markups

Questions:

**General Data we need**

**Number, type and frequency of RFPs**

**Success rates, funding percentage for different proposals.**

* **Who is writing the proposal**s? (DOE)
* PI position: e.g. postdoc, assist. Prof, assoc. Prof, tenured faculty, research faculty, Gender, race/ethnicity, geographical location, size of institution (DOE)
* How many proposals submitted by same PI - broken down by PI category (DOE)
* Number of senior researchers on proposal (DOE)
  + per year, per category of PI, per funding requested
* Compare success rates of different sorts of proposals (DOE)
  + per PI category, per number of senior researchers, per number of proposals submitted in the last 5 years, per funding requested
* Years between proposals (DOE)
  + cross correlate to success rate, PI category, # of senior researcher
* Do younger researchers rise through the ranks (are researcher on proposal and then become PI later)?
  + Number of years between first appearance as senior researcher on a proposal to PI
  + What number or fraction of the community is supported by soft money?

**Nature of community support questions**

**Need clarification on what we mean by communities, and for which of these we can collect information. For each community we could identify the source of information??? (DIDN’T QUITE FOLLOW THIS DISCUSSION!)**