At the request of the Planetary Science Subcommittee, VEXAG solicited feedback from the Venus science community in response to the proposed restructuring of the Planetary Science Division R&A Program. Questions and Comments were solicited via an announcement in the PEN as well as at the annual VEXAG meeting held in Washington, DC, November 19-21. Many community comments were submitted to multiple groups (SBAG, OPAG, MEPAG, etc.) and have been posted as part of those submissions as well as on the R&A website hosted by the Lunar and Planetary Institute. Those questions are not duplicated here. Many questions were also addressed as part of a presentation by Jonathan Rall to the VEXAG on November 21. The remaining questions are provided below.

At a top level, there is a general concern that the schedule for introducing the newly restructured R&A Program with ROSES 2014 (in less than three months) is proceeding at a pace that does not allow for thoughtful review and orderly implementation. As a result, the VEXAG Executive Committee endorses a finding that PSD consider inclusion of a Senior Review as recommended by the 2011 Planetary Science Subcommittee Report (the so-called “Greeley Report”).

1. There is a general endorsement of a Senior Review process in order to allow HQ to present details of the transition of the new R&A structure to the science community and to provide additional time for a more orderly transition to the new structure. There is a question of why there is such a quick fuse in implementing this transition and not allowing a more thorough community review if, indeed, this transition has been in the works for several years?

2. The community would like to be assured that the restructuring does not take money away from an already highly oversubscribed R&A program. Will the new structure preserve the current content and be revenue neutral?

3. It has been claimed that a primary reason for the R&A restructuring is improved efficiency. We have not seen any examples given by NASA as to the expected efficiencies of the new system relative to the old one. What are the expected benefits? How will the new system result in increased selection rates? If it doesn't result in higher selection rates, what is the benefit?

4. During the presentation to VEXAG on 11/21/13 there was mention that the Planetary Mission Data Analysis Program (PMDAP) is funded through the Discovery Program and that there is an effort to move this program back to a stronger emphasis on Discovery mission support. There has never been a Discovery mission to Venus (although I suppose MESSENGER has a little Venus-related data). So, limiting the "new" Data Analysis Program(s) to Discovery-only would mean zero funds for Venus-related data analysis.
Will there be an avenue for proposing Venus Data Analysis in the new structure? Archived, non-Discovery data (i.e., a great deal of data that has been laboriously preserved in the PDS) would no longer be fundable. It also would put a strain on international collaborations, since ESA, JAXA, IKI, etc. missions are not Discovery missions. That is, analysis of current and future data from Venus Express, Akatsuki, Venera-D, etc. could not be funded except through participating and interdisciplinary scientist programs.

5. Will the new programs in aggregate maintain the same balance in overall science disciplines (i.e, theory and analysis, ground-based astronomical observations, laboratory studies) as the current balance?

6. There is concern that, over time, some science disciplines, for example – ground-based astronomical observations, planetary atmospheres - may suffer under the new structure when they would not have been under the old structure wherein they had specific programs specified for them. What guidelines, precautions, etc, are being considered for the management of these new programs so that, over the years, the overall program maintains the richness and breadth of science that is a hallmark of the current planetary R&A program?

7. It is apparent that one of the five programs will encompass the vast majority of proposals and funds. How does NASA intend to conduct science reviews for such a large program that will likely attract proposals from a very large fraction of planetary scientists? There is concern that it will not be possible to form the appropriate panels of knowledgeable, unconflicted reviewers.

8. It has been asserted that the new R&A themes preserve the old program elements. However, it is important to insure that important science disciplines have not been lost. Therefore, it is important to provide the mapping from old programs to the new structure.

9. Is this change intended to encourage proposers to submit fewer and more consolidated proposals?

10. Will future selections be more closely related to NASA themes and objectives as presented in the Decadal Survey?