11/5/13 PSS Telecon

Committee Members Present: Jim Green (HQ), Jonathan Rall (HQ), Sarah Noble (HQ), Janet Luhmann (chair), Julie Castillo, Nancy Chabot, Dave Draper, Lisa Gaddis, Lori Glaze, Mihalyi Horanyi, Chris House, Hap McSween, Jeff Plescia, Lisa Pratt, Louise Prockter, and Jessica Sunshine

Goal of the meeting:

The purpose of this telecon was to provide a Planetary Science Division update, including an update on the R&A reorganization, to score the GPRAMA, and to complete annual ethics training for the members.

Jim Green – PSD update:

Jim provided an update on current and upcoming PSD activities, including the successful launch of LADEE and the upcoming (Nov 18th) launch of MAVEN. He noted the payload anomaly on BRRISON, the comet ISON balloon mission, but also that the payload was successfully recovered and the telescope will be repaired and available for future flights.

Jim discussed the status of EPO under the continuing resolution. Under a CR we are required to maintain the same level of effort and budget as in FY13, therefore, we have not implemented the proposed consolidation yet but will continue to make changes during the CR in alignment with the COSTEM strategic plan. In the meantime, the waiver process will continue.

The last Senior Review for extended missions was completed in July 2012 which covered FY13 and 14, so we are beginning to organize the next review. Guidelines for the missions will be issued in early 2014. The funding available will be roughly constant, but the new round will include Curiosity, as well as Cassini, LRO, Mars Express, MRO, Opportunity, and Mars Odyssey. MESSENGER will not be included because it doesn’t have enough fuel to extend beyond its current planned extended mission.

Jim announced the results of the SSERVI teams. Nine teams have been chosen for this joint PSD/HEOMD institute.

Jonathan Rall – R&A

Jonathan spoke briefly about the R&A program and the on-going exercise to reorganize R&A portfolios. The core programs will be reorganized around the five PSD objectives rather than the current mix of target- and discipline-focused calls. A virtual community town hall is being planned for the first week of December and a website will be created to engage the community and receive feedback.

Questions and Answers

Dave Draper asked if the 5 core programs would have equal funds. Dave was concerned because he felt the new structure put a heavy emphasis on life and did not demonstrate a commitment to sample science.
Jonathan said no and that there is no intention to leave out any particular field. Michael New also reiterated that the funding for the programs would not be equal, but that funding levels for each category have yet to be set.

Lori Glaze asked about the Mars R&A, which is currently under the Mars budget line. Jonathan said that both Mars Fundamental Research and Outer Planets Research would be consolidated with the rest of R&A in FY15. The Mars and Cassini DAP programs will stay with their respective budget lines.

Julie Castillo asked about getting input from the PSS for the upcoming Senior Review. Jim said that yes, he is very interested in getting input from the PSS, particularly on key distinguishers. The budget is decreasing and we will have to take more content out. Janet suggested, and Jim agreed, a telecon on this topic is in order, probably in early January.

Julie also asked about the Outer Planets Flagship. Jim said that since there was money targeted towards this by law last year (~69M after sequestration), that will continue under the CR. We will continue to move towards a KDP (key decision point), but there is no money on the horizon to do this mission.

Louise Prockter had heard a rumor that the travel rules were being relaxed. Jim said no, not really, this is tied to the sequester and will likely remain in place as long as that holds. There are a couple of minor changes for Civil Servants however, they no longer need to demonstrate a substantial role in order to attend a conference and also international conferences will now be treated the same as domestic ones.

Lori asked about the state of the interdisciplinary climate R&A program. Jim is still working on that, he is hopeful that it will happen in ROSES14.

Janet asked about the timeline for the next Discovery AO. Jim said that it just can’t be scheduled until we have a budget, but we are doing everything we can to be poised and ready when the time comes. We will have a better idea after the President releases his budget in February.

Janet reminded Jonathan that the PSS would still like to have a discussion about the effectiveness of institutes vs traditional R&A grants. This was scheduled for the F2F that was canceled by the gov’t shutdown. Jonathan will keep it on the agenda for the next F2F.

Julie noted that based on the new selections for SSERVI, it seems to be quite difficult to break into the institute, many of the selections were PIs from the precursor NLSI. Max Bernstein said that while a lot of the PI names are familiar, if you look closely at the composition of the teams actually half of the people are new, though there is no question that “incumbents” had an advantage.

**Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRAMA)**

GPRAMA requires the PSS to grade the progress that the planetary community has made over the last year towards our strategic goal to “ascertain the content, origin, and evolution of the solar system and the potential for life elsewhere.” PSD compiled a document with several research highlights for each of
the five planetary science objectives and the committee was asked to review the document, adding further info where appropriate and grading our progress. The committee unanimously graded all five categories GREEN.

AG reports

The meeting closed with some discussion from the AG chairs.

Of note:
- The question of whether AG chairs are allowed to be official PSS members came up. Jonathan Rall inferred that the rules no longer seem to forbid it and that letters of appointment would be going out to those that did not already have them.
- The Bi-Lat with Russia scheduled for during the shutdown was canceled, but Jim continues to look for opportunities for interactions and recently received a letter from Russia with opening discussion points.
- The LEAG community is confused over the rules regarding discussions with China and concerned about lost opportunities for science regarding the Chang’e 3 lander and the LADEE mission. Jim notes that this has not escaped his attention and we are looking for ways within the system to do that without breaking the law. Jeff Plescia asked if there was a way to get an exemption. Jim said yes, that’s what we are seeking.
- SBAG is very concerned about the lack of a Dawn@Ceres PSP and the short time available to get one up and running. Jim said there is no intent not to do this, we will work on it.

Findings

1. The PSS finds that the details of the R&A program restructuring need to be communicated to the planetary science community as soon as possible to obtain feedback, to answer questions and make clarifications (including to existing grantees within the old programs), and to have the information disseminated before the next ROSES call for proposals in early 2014.
2. The Senior Review Process needs to be revisited considering the continuing budgetary constraints and challenges, especially in light of the proposal pressure that will be added by the MSL transition to extended mission status in 2014. The PSS should be involved in the discussion of the new cycle guidelines so that community input is included in drafting the call for proposals.
3. The Discovery AO restart is unlikely in the near term in view of the current budgetary situation. However, because some proposed concepts require specific timing of a mission or investigation, the PSD must strive to meet a target date for next AO as soon as the budgetary environment provides a clear path.
4. Given the budget environment, the PSS finds there is a need for clarification regarding further Europa mission development support. With the anticipated continuation of the CR and its budget limitations, the path for the current Europa developmental program is very unclear.
5. Face-to-face meetings are essential for AG’s and PSS, especially in light of the recent lack of them and all of the matters that would benefit from additional community engagement. The PSS urges NASA to enable them again early in 2014.