HQ Responses to Findings from 5th SBAG Meeting

Small Bodies Assessment Group (SBAG)
6th Formal Meeting
Washington, DC
Jan 17-18, 2012
Comments on Findings from SBAG-5

Finding 1

SBAG endorses the primary conclusion of the Target NEO Workshop Report that a space-based survey telescope is a foundational asset for piloted and robotic exploration of NEOs, by enabling the identification and characterization of a long synodic period population. Such objects may provide numerous targets for low-energy, short duration missions for reconnaissance, sample return, planetary defense, and human visitation. Note that this finding aligns with a similar finding made by SBAG at our August 2010 meeting.

Comments: A space-based survey telescope will be the subject of concept studies within the next year or two, and will continue to be allowed as a viable subject of proposal for future Discovery and New Frontiers opportunities.
Finding 2

At the recent SBAG workshop, David Morrison (Director of NASA’s Lunar Science Institute [LSI]) proposed expanding the scope of the LSI to include NEOs. This proposal does not seem appropriate because there is very little overlap between the NEO and Lunar science communities. However, the Institute concept has proven useful for the Astrobiology and Lunar Science communities, and expanding it to small bodies has merit, especially given the prospect of future crewed missions to such bodies. If NASA pursues the Institute concept for small bodies, the management of the enterprise should be openly competed. NASA should also consider the potential cost savings associated with managing such an Institute by private corporations and universities.

Comments: The concept of a “Small Bodies Science Institute” is being studied in the context of other entities that are already sponsored by the Planetary Science Division. It is unlikely more than one institute would be co-sponsored with Exploration, but a new formulation for it would be re-competed.