

IV. VISITING COMMITTEES (VC)

STSCI – Space Telescope Science Institute

A. POLICY

It is the Policy of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA) to create an Institute Visiting Committee (IVC) comprised of members of diverse expertise who have no direct connection with AURA, to advise the AURA Board of Directors in a biennial peer review on the health and well being of the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) and of the effectiveness of AURA as the managing entity. In the alternating years an Interim Institute Visiting Committee (IIVC) will conduct a less in-depth review of the STScI under the auspices of AURA's Space Telescope Institute Council (STIC; STIC provides the principal on-going focus for AURA's oversight of the STScI). In addition, after giving notice to the STScI Director and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) designated Contracting Officer, the Chair of the IVC or IIVC shall report formally to the cognizant NASA Program Office.

B. SCOPE AND BACKGROUND

Effective February 11, 1981, AURA contracted with NASA to establish, operate, and maintain the STScI so that the STScI could conduct the science operations program of the Space Telescope (ST). Since that time, the STScI has become a Center supporting more than one NASA program. As a consequence, the role of the IVC affects more than one program.

C. POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

1. Membership:

The IVC will consist of six or more members, at least four of whom will be astronomers. The IVC members will be selected by the STIC on the basis of their experience and judgment, including that related to expertise in managing a large scientific service organization. Appropriate concern will be given to obtaining a reasonable balance in the expertise represented among appointed IVC members. In order to provide appropriate continuity, IVC members will serve staggered three-report, effectively six-year, terms. Appropriate concern will be given to constitute a balanced committee in terms of gender and ethnic representation, as well as discipline. No AURA employee, member of the Board or the Directors, or consultant to AURA may serve on the IVC. Individuals considered for IVC membership shall be required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest between the IVC role and other non-AURA related activities (e.g., relationships with AURA competitors).

The IIVC shall consist of three members: a STIC member, the current IVC Chair, and a designated member of the IVC.

IVC and IIVC members will be reimbursed by the STScI, in accordance with STScI procedures, for expenses in performing their visiting functions.

2. Structure:

The IVC Chair will be elected by the STIC from among the appointed members of the IVC and upon recommendation by the Chairman of STIC. The IVC Chair is appointed by AURA with the concurrence of the cognizant NASA Programs Office, for a nominal two-report, or four-year, term. After such period, at the discretion of the AURA President, the IVC Chair may remain on the committee as a regular member for one more report to provide continuity and to support the following Chair.

D. FUNCTIONS OF THE INSTITUTE VISITING COMMITTEES

1. The IVC will provide the equivalent of peer reviews of the STScI to the STIC and to the AURA Board of Directors. The IVC will focus on the status and health of the STScI and the ability of the STScI to carry out its mission. The specific tasks of the IVC include:
 - a. Assess how effectively the STScI is functioning as a service-oriented national astronomical research center;
 - b. Assess how effectively STScI fulfills its major mission of managing the science operation center for HST and preparing to be the science operation center for JWST;
 - c. Evaluate the overall productivity and quality of research and the general professional stature of the scientific staff. Such evaluations could include a review of published research by the scientific staff, and an assessment of scientific productivity over an appropriate period of time;
 - d. Evaluate the implementation of AURA policies and best practices;
 - e. Assess the adequacy of AURA or NASA policies with respect to STScI; and
 - f. Advise the STIC, the AURA Board, and after appropriate notification, the cognizant NASA Program Office(s), of its findings.
2. The IVC may examine any facet of operations of the STScI, and of AURA as the managing entity.

E. STScI VISITS

1. Scheduling

The IVC will visit the STScI biennially. The IIVC will visit the STScI in alternating years from the IVC. The IVC, or some of its members, may visit more often if needed to review an STScI activity in greater depth.

Such additional visits may be called by the IVC Chair with the approval of AURA's President.

2. Agenda Distribution

The IVC Chair will prepare an agenda and a list of the major topics to be reviewed during the IVC visits and will furnish a copy to the STScI Director and the AURA President at least one month before the VC visit.

3. STScI Director/Board Representative Presence

The IVC is encouraged to invite the STScI Director and Deputy Director and one or more members of the STIC and/or AURA Board to meet with the IVC to discuss the IVC preliminary findings before its report is written. This practice allows early recognition and clear understanding by responsible AURA officials of any problems perceived by the Committee and correction of possible IVC misperceptions. The AURA President will normally be available during VC visits to answer questions and meet informally with the Committee at the end of each visit.

As requested by the IVC Chair, the STScI Director and/or AURA President will provide the Committee with relevant reference material, such as that supporting the Director's most recent annual report to the AURA Board of Directors, copies of minutes of the STIC meetings of the preceding twelve months, copies of any relevant AURA policies and other documents that may assist the IVC in fulfilling its mission.

F. INSTITUTE VISITING COMMITTEE REPORTS TO AURA

A report on each visit to the STScI will be prepared by the IVC and transmitted through the AURA President to the STIC and to the STScI Director within a reasonable time following each visit. After STIC review and acceptance, the STScI will provide sufficient copies to the AURA President for distribution to the AURA Board. In addition to receiving written reports from the IVC, AURA may invite the IVC Chair to attend the STIC meeting at which the Committee's report is considered. The IVC Chair is encouraged to accept such invitations if there are any significant issues which the STIC or AURA can resolve.

1. Content:

The IVC visit report should cover the tasks described in Section D of this policy. The IVC should be unbiased, objective, critical, and balanced in its appraisals. Recommendations, if any, should be clearly identified as such. The report will contain a summary of the process, the major findings, and specific recommendations.

2. Report Distribution:

Written IVC reports will be received by the AURA President, who will distribute copies to the STScI Director and to the STIC.

The STScI Director will make a timely response to the STIC via the AURA President on the topics covered in the report. After STIC considers the IVC report and the STScI Director's response, the IVC report will be distributed to the AURA Board. Based on the Director's response and comments from the AURA President, the STIC will prepare an appropriate response to the IVC report (including the Director's response as an attachment) and transmit this set of Documents to the AURA Board of Directors for acceptance.

The STIC's comments will be adopted as those of AURA; but in unusual circumstances, additional commentary representing the AURA Board's perspective on the report may be provided to the AURA President and STScI. After AURA Board action, AURA's President will provide the AURA and STScI Director's responses to the IVC. Further, with the IVC Chair and AURA concurrence, the AURA President will ensure delivery of the IVC report and related responses to the cognizant NASA Program Office(s) in a timely fashion before the contractual deadline. After their transmittal to the AURA Board and to NASA, the IVC report and subsequent responses may be made available by the AURA President to others upon request.

3. Privileged Portions of Reports

In its reports, the IVC should not hesitate to discuss any issues of concern including frank, general comments regarding any aspect of STScI, including the staff, but without naming specific individuals. If the IVC also sees a need to comment critically upon the work of individuals it should do so in a detachable, "privileged" portion of its report, which will be accessible only to the STScI Director, AURA Officers, STIC, and the AURA Board, and will not be forwarded to NASA. The non-privileged portions of such a report should not include a reference to any privileged portions.

IV. VISITING COMMITTEES (VC) Continued:

NOAO – National Optical Astronomy Observatory

A. POLICY

It is AURA policy to establish and maintain a means for conducting independent program assessment in order to evaluate the performance of its observatories and its governance in fulfilling our mission and contractual obligations to our funding agencies. To this end an NOAO Observatory Visiting Committee (OVC) made up of members with relevant backgrounds, having no direct connection with AURA, will advise the Board of Directors on a periodic basis in a “peer review” capacity as to the scientific productivity, management, and overall health and well-being of the National Optical Astronomy Observatory.

B. SCOPE AND BACKGROUND

AURA established its initial Visiting Committee for NOAO in 1971. In 1978 a separate Visiting Committee for the Sac Peak Observatory was established. These merged in 1981. In 2003, with the establishment of a new cooperative agreement, NSF established a special Program Review Panel intended to assist and advise the Astronomy Division in its oversight and assessment of NOAO (excluding NSO). In view of the functional similarity of that committee, AURA temporarily suspended the activities of its visiting committee during the period of that cooperative agreement. In 2007, AURA resumed its Visiting Committee activity in order to strengthen its management and oversight functions in areas not otherwise addressed by the NSF Program Review Panel.

C. POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

The Observatory Council is delegated the responsibility for constituting and guiding the activities of the OVC. The OVC will be elected by the Observatory Council and will be composed of not less than six members. Such members shall be from varying backgrounds but shall not be Member Representatives or on any AURA governance entity elected by the Member Representatives. Members will serve for four year terms. The Chairperson shall be appointed from within the membership of the Visiting Committee. The Committee will prepare for the AURA Board of Directors a report of its visits, including findings and recommendations. After acceptance by the Board, the report and AURA responses thereto will be made available to National Science Foundation.

D. FUNCTIONS OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

The goal of the Visiting Committee will be to assess the performance of NOAO as a whole including its observatory sites and major organizational components. The Observatory Council may, at its discretion, charter specific visits to focus on specific areas or functions within NOAO.

It is expected that the Visiting Committee’s review will provide the equivalent of “peer reviews” of the observatory. In addition to any specific areas chartered by the Observatory Council, The OVC is encouraged to examine any facet of operations of

NOAO or of AURA, as its managing entity, which the Committee wishes to review that might relate to the performance of the organization.

The Director of NOAO will provide the Visiting Committee with the NOAO Program and Long Range plans for prior years, as well as descriptions of research for use in the assessment of staff research as described immediately below. In addition, at the request of the Observatory Council, the Director will provide an overall self-assessment of NOAO. The Corporate Office will provide the Committee with an accounting of relevant activities of the Observatory Council, of the AURA Board and other relevant committees having a bearing on the direction and performance of NOAO.

1. Assessment of NOAO as a National Organization

The Visiting Committee will be expected to pay particular attention to the effectiveness of NOAO as a national organization both in terms of visitor-oriented facilities and national system leadership. The Visiting Committee will focus on the status and health of NOAO as related to the Program Plan and Long Range Plans. The specific roles of the OVC will be primarily to:

- a. Review how effectively the Observatory and its components are functioning as national astronomical facilities and research institutions;
- b. Review how well AURA policies are being carried out in that regard;
- c. Review the adequacy of the AURA policies with respect to the Observatory functions; and,
- d. Advise the AURA Board accordingly.

2. Assessment of Staff Research

The OVC is expected to evaluate the general professional stature, research productivity, and quality of research output of the scientific staff at NOAO. The evaluation should include as many of the following steps as possible and appropriate:

- a. Review of preprints and reprints of published results;
- b. Review of quality and effectiveness of instrumentation developed by staff;
- c. Comparison of productivity with what might be expected on the basis of past years' program plans when these are considered over an appropriate period of time—e.g., three years;
- d. Face-to-face discussion of research programs with appropriate members of the scientific staff, individually and/or in committee sessions; and,

- e. Results of reviews by the Telescope Allocation Committee of staff requests for telescope time, if available.
3. Self-evaluation by NOAO Divisions

In order to enable the OVC to carry out periodic comprehensive reviews of the science at NOAO in greater depth than is possible in a visit of a few days, visited NOAO divisions are expected to prepare self-evaluations of the health of science as seen by the division itself. The scope of a self-evaluation shall be such that, in the opinion of the Director of the division to be visited, it fairly represents the nature, quality, and scope of research underway by the scientific staff and to the extent feasible of research by visitors.

E. OBSERVATORY VISITS

1. Scheduling

The OVC will meet at such times chartered by the Observatory Council. All NOAO programs will be reviewed at least once every three years. Also, each research organization reporting to the Director will be reviewed at least once every three years.

2. Observatory Director AURA Corporate Office

The OVC will be encouraged to invite the NOAO Director, the Associate Directors, and the AURA President to meet with them informally at the end of the visit to discuss their major findings before their report is written.

F. VISITING COMMITTEE REPORTS TO AURA

A visit report will be prepared by the OVC and transmitted to the AURA Board through the President pending acceptance by the Observatory Council. The Director of NOAO will provide a response accompanying the report.

1. Content

The Committee Report should specifically include the Committee's evaluation of the effectiveness of NOAO as a visitor-oriented institution and the productivity of its scientific staff in research and instrumentation development. The OVC report is an important element in the Board's assessment of the effectiveness of NOAO as a research center. Therefore, the OVC should be unbiased, objective and critical in its appraisals.

2. Report Distribution

Written reports by the OVC will be received by the AURA President who will transmit them to the AURA Board for consideration at the time of its next regular meeting. The report and responses to it will be transmitted to the NSF Division of Astronomical Sciences after January 1 of each year. The OVC report and responses will be made available to others at the discretion of the AURA President.

3. Privileged Portions of Reports

In its reports the OVC may discuss any matters that are impersonal or general in nature. However, occasionally the OVC may also see a need to comment critically upon the productivity of individual managers or scientists. These and any other comments regarding personnel matters must be included in the privileged portion of the report. This communication will be accessible only to the members of the AURA Board, the Observatory Council, the Director of NOAO and the Associate Director concerned.

IV. VISITING COMMITTEES (VC) Continued:

NSO – National Solar Observatory

A. POLICY

It is AURA policy to establish and maintain a means for conducting independent program assessment in order to evaluate the performance of its observatories and its governance in fulfilling our mission and contractual obligations to our funding agencies. To this end an NSO Solar Observatory Visiting Committee (SVC) made up of members with relevant backgrounds, having no direct connection with AURA, will advise the Board of Directors on a periodic basis in a “peer review” capacity as to the scientific productivity, management, and overall health and well-being of the National Solar Observatory.

B. SCOPE AND BACKGROUND

AURA established its initial Visiting Committee for NOAO in 1971. In 1978 a separate Visiting Committee for the Sac Peak Observatory was established. These merged in 1981. In 2003, with the establishment of a new cooperative agreement, NSF established a special Program Review Panel intended to assist and advise the Astronomy Division in its oversight and assessment of NOAO (excluding NSO). In view of the functional similarity of that committee, AURA temporarily suspended the activities of its visiting committee during the period of that cooperative agreement. In 2007, AURA resumed its Visiting Committee activity in order to strengthen its management and oversight functions in areas not otherwise addressed by the NSF Program Review Panel.

C. POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

The Solar Observatory Council is delegated the responsibility for constituting and guiding the activities of the SVC. The SVC will be elected by the Solar Observatory Council and will be composed of not less than six members. Such members shall be from varying backgrounds but shall not be Member Representatives or on any AURA governance entity elected by the Member Representatives. Members will serve for four year terms. The Chairperson shall be appointed from within the membership of the Visiting Committee.

The SVC will prepare for acceptance by the AURA Board of Directors a report of its visits, including findings and recommendations. After acceptance by the Board, the report and AURA responses thereto will be made available to National Science Foundation.

D. FUNCTIONS OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE

The goal of the Visiting Committee will be to assess the performance of NSO as a whole including its observatory sites and major organizational components. The Solar Observatory Council may, at its discretion, charter specific visits to focus on

specific areas or functions within NSO.

It is expected that the Visiting Committee's review will provide the equivalent of "peer reviews" of the observatory. In addition to any specific areas chartered by the Solar Observatory Council, The SVC is encouraged to examine any facet of operations of NSO or of AURA, as its managing entity, which the Committee wishes to review that might relate to the performance of the organization.

The Director of NSO will provide the Visiting Committee with the NSO Program and Long Range plans for prior years, as well as descriptions of research for use in the assessment of staff research as described immediately below. In addition, at the request of the Solar Observatory Council, the Director will provide an overall self-assessment of NSO. The Corporate Office will provide the Committee with an accounting of relevant activities of the Solar Observatory Council, of the AURA Board and other relevant committees having a bearing on the direction and performance of NSO.

1. Assessment of NSO as a National Organization

The Visiting Committee will be expected to pay particular attention to the effectiveness of NSO as a national organization both in terms of visitor-oriented facilities and national leadership. The SVC will focus on the status and health of NSO as related to the Program Plan and Long Range Plans. The specific roles of the SVC will be primarily to:

- a. Review how effectively the Observatory and its components are functioning as national astronomical facilities and research institutions;
- b. Review how well AURA policies are being carried out in that regard;
- c. Review the adequacy of the AURA policies with respect to the Observatory functions; and,
- d. Advise the AURA Board accordingly.

2. Assessment of Staff Research

The SVC is expected to evaluate the general professional stature, research productivity, and quality of research output of the scientific staff at NSO. The evaluation should include as many of the following steps as possible and appropriate:

- a. Review of preprints and reprints of published results;
- b. Review of quality and effectiveness of instrumentation developed by staff;
- c. Comparison of productivity with what might be expected on the basis of past years' program plans when these are considered over an appropriate period of time—e.g., three years;

- d. Face-to-face discussion of research programs with appropriate members of the scientific staff, individually and/or in committee sessions; and,
 - e. Results of reviews by the Telescope Allocation Committee of staff requests for telescope time, if available.
3. Self-evaluation by NSO Divisions

In order to enable the SVC to carry out periodic comprehensive reviews of the science at NSO in greater depth than is possible in a visit of a few days, visited NSO divisions are expected to prepare self-evaluations of the health of science as seen by the division itself. The scope of a self-evaluation shall be such that, in the opinion of the Director of the division to be visited, it fairly represents the nature, quality, and scope of research underway by the scientific staff and to the extent feasible of research by visitors.

E. OBSERVATORY VISITS

1. Scheduling

The SVC will meet at such times chartered by the Solar Observatory Council. All NSO programs will be reviewed at least once every three years. Also, each research organization reporting to the Director will be reviewed at least once every three years; and,

2. Observatory Director AURA Corporate Office

The SVC will be encouraged to invite the NSO Director, the Associate Directors, and the AURA President to meet with them informally at the end of the visit to discuss their major findings before their report is written.

F. VISITING COMMITTEE REPORTS TO AURA

A visit report will be prepared by the Visiting Committee and transmitted to the AURA Board through the President pending acceptance by the Solar Observatory Council. The Director of NSO will provide a response accompanying the report.

1. Content

The SVC Report should specifically include the Committee's evaluation of the effectiveness of NSO as a visitor-oriented institution and the productivity of its scientific staff in research and instrumentation development. The SVC report is an important element in the Board's assessment of the effectiveness of NSO as a research center. Therefore, the SVC should be unbiased, objective and critical in its appraisals;

2. Report Distribution

Written reports by the SVC will be received by the AURA President who will transmit them to the AURA Board for consideration at the time of its next regular meeting. The report and responses to it will be transmitted to the

NSF Division of Astronomical Sciences after January 1 of each year the SVC report and responses will be made available to others at the discretion of the AURA President; and,

3. Privileged Portions of Reports

In its reports the SVC may discuss any matters that are impersonal or general in nature. However, occasionally the SVC may also see a need to comment critically upon the productivity of individual managers or scientists. These and any other comments regarding personnel matters must be included in the privileged portion of the report. This communication will be accessible only to the members of the AURA Board, the Solar Observatory Council, the Director of NSO and the Associate Director concerned.