

**ARECIBO OBSERVATORY (ARECIBO)**

**\$6,080,000**  
**-\$1,920,000 / -24.0%**

**Arecibo Observatory Funding**  
(Dollars in Millions)

FY 2017 Actual	FY 2018 (TBD)	FY 2019 Request	Change over FY 2017 Actual	
			Amount	Percent
\$8.00	-	\$6.08	-\$1.92	-24.0%

Arecibo is a center for multidisciplinary research and education with advanced observational facilities. The observatory’s principal facility is one of the world’s largest single-dish radio/radar telescopes, a 305-meter diameter reflector located near the town of Arecibo in western Puerto Rico on 120 acres of U.S. Government-owned land. Arecibo is currently operated and managed by SRI International (SRI) and subrecipients, Universities Space Research Association (USRA) and Universidad Metropolitana (UMET), under a cooperative agreement with NSF that initially ran from October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2016, and was extended by 18 months to March 31, 2018. The observatory serves over 350 users annually with a wide range of research and observing instrumentation in passive radio astronomy, solar system radar astronomy, and space and atmospheric sciences. A peer-review telescope allocation committee provides merit-based telescope time to users. The committee is common to the three fields, but specific subject matter experts from outside the observatory are consulted for reviews. NSF does not provide awards targeted specifically for use of Arecibo, although some Arecibo users are supported through NSF or NASA grants to pursue scientific programs that require use of the facility.

Currently, Arecibo is staffed at about 120 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees, of which about 100 are funded by NSF. The remaining FTEs are supported by a grant from NASA, by the Angel Ramos Foundation Visitor Center, and by other funding sources. Staff include approximately 20 scientists who, along with engineers, technicians, and operators, are available to help visiting investigators with observing programs. In addition, there are management, administrative, and clerical positions, as well as maintenance staff, and several postdoctoral scholars and students.

Along with the entire island of Puerto Rico, Arecibo Observatory was severely impacted by Hurricane Maria, which struck on September 20, 2017. The observatory ceased regular operations shortly before Maria’s Puerto Rico landfall. Commercial power was restored on December 9, 2017, and most normal observatory operations resumed by the end of December. Funding for observatory repairs are provided in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018.

**Total Obligations for Arecibo**  
(Dollars in Millions)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	ESTIMATES <sup>1</sup>				
	Actual	(TBD)	Request	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Operations & Maintenance (MPS)	\$3.90	-	\$3.05	\$2.13	\$1.50	\$1.13	\$1.00	\$1.00
Operations & Maintenance (GEO)	4.10	-	\$3.03	\$2.13	\$1.50	\$1.13	\$1.00	\$1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$6.08</b>	<b>\$4.25</b>	<b>\$3.00</b>	<b>\$2.25</b>	<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$2.00</b>

<sup>1</sup> The current cooperative agreement, initially scheduled to end in FY 2016, has been extended through 31 March 2018.

Arecibo is jointly supported by the MPS Division of Astronomical Sciences (AST) and the GEO Division of Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences (AGS). Based on the 2006 AST Senior Review recommendations, AST and AGS reduced support for the Arecibo Observatory. An external review of the AST portfolio was completed in 2012, and an external review of the AGS portfolio was completed in 2016.

## *Major Multi-User Research Facilities*

In 2012, the AST Portfolio Review Committee recommended “continued AST involvement in Arecibo be re-evaluated later in the decade in light of the science opportunities and budget forecasts at that time.”<sup>8</sup> The New Worlds, New Horizons: Midterm Assessment (August 2016) reinforced this, with Recommendation 3.1 noting: “The NSF should proceed with divestment from ground-based facilities that have a lower scientific impact.”<sup>9</sup>

The Geospace Section (GS) Portfolio Review Committee was charged by the NSF Advisory Committee for Geosciences to review the most promising Geospace science strategies and critical capabilities and to reconcile these with the science goals described by the 2013 Decadal Survey for Solar and Space Physics.<sup>10</sup> The GS is associated with AGS and its portfolio includes grant programs in upper-atmospheric sciences, space science, and space weather. This GS portfolio review was carried out using the assumption of an inflation-adjusted, flat budget for GS over the next decade to FY 2026. The GS Portfolio Review Committee recommendations include the reduction of annual AGS Arecibo Observatory funding from \$4.10 million to \$1.10 million by 2020.

GEO commissioned a review from a second panel assembled by the National Academies that assessed the process by which the GS Portfolio Review Committee reached their findings and recommendations. The panel published<sup>11</sup> the results of this review in early 2017 and, for Arecibo, reiterated the recommendations of the GS Portfolio Review Committee.

Because of these potential changes, NSF prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate proposed operational changes at Arecibo due to funding constraints, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. NSF also completed its compliance obligations with the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Endangered Species Act. NSF prepared a Final EIS, which was published in August 2017.<sup>12</sup> Following publication of the EIS, NSF published a Record of Decision<sup>13</sup> in November 2017, which formalizes the selection of NSF's preferred alternative: to collaborate with interested parties to maintain science-focused operations at the Observatory with reduced agency funding.

NSF issued a solicitation in January 2017 requesting proposals to provide continued operations and management of Arecibo for five years, but at reduced funding. The planned NSF funding profile presented in the solicitation gradually tapered NSF support to \$2.0 million by the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the award. In February 2018, NSF announced an award to University of Central Florida (UCF) to undertake formal transition activities expected to lead to UCF assumption of full operations and management responsibilities for Arecibo Observatory. The award ensures continued science-focused operations that will maintain the Observatory's existing research lines of atmospheric, planetary and astronomical research.

Partnerships and Other Funding Sources: Arecibo supplements NSF support with funding provided by other federal and non-federal sources. Since FY 2010, the NASA Near Earth Object Observation Program has committed \$2.0 million annually to Arecibo for the planetary radar program; this increased to \$3.60 million for FY 2013, with more observing time allocated to the NASA program. In FY 2019, NASA support is expected to continue at approximately \$3.60 million.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/ast\\_portfolio\\_review.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/ast_portfolio_review.jsp)

<sup>9</sup> [www.nap.edu/read/23560/chapter/1](http://www.nap.edu/read/23560/chapter/1)

<sup>10</sup> [www.nap.edu/read/13060/chapter/1](http://www.nap.edu/read/13060/chapter/1)

<sup>11</sup> [www.nsf.gov/geo/adgeo/geospace-review/geospace-portfolio-review-final-rpt-2016.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/geo/adgeo/geospace-review/geospace-portfolio-review-final-rpt-2016.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/env\\_impact\\_reviews/arecibo/arecibo\\_feis.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/env_impact_reviews/arecibo/arecibo_feis.jsp)

<sup>13</sup> [www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/env\\_impact\\_reviews/arecibo/arecibo\\_rod.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/env_impact_reviews/arecibo/arecibo_rod.jsp)

**Education and Public Outreach (EPO):** Arecibo hosts a Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) site, and Ph.D. students receive training through the use of the facility. Over 350 students have participated in REU programs at Arecibo. In collaboration with the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Arecibo holds a summer school on single-dish radio astronomy techniques. Arecibo also sponsors a major outreach program in Puerto Rico via the Angel Ramos Foundation Visitor Center as well as summer workshops for K-12 teachers. This center attracts more than 80,000 visitors each year; over 1.4 million people have visited since its opening in 1997. Approximately 25 percent of these visitors are K-12 students. Exhibits at the visitor center were updated, and physical renovations to the visitor center building were completed in FY 2016. These improvements were funded by the Angel Ramos Foundation and the Ana G. Méndez University System and were formally approved by NSF. With funds received from the Puerto Rico Department of Education, Arecibo has hosted numerous teacher workshops and has trained approximately 500 teachers. This program integrates formal activities at the Angel Ramos Foundation Visitor Center into the STEM curriculum in Puerto Rico. Arecibo also hosts several meetings each year within a wide variety of scientific disciplines.



An image of the Arecibo Radio Telescope in Puerto Rico. The platform suspension structure, including the Gregorian dome that houses the main suite of research instruments, is visible over the 305-meter primary reflector dish below. Credit: Arecibo Observatory/NSF.

**Operations and Maintenance:** Arecibo administers observing time to the astronomy and aeronomy communities via competitive observing proposals and conducts educational and public outreach programs at all levels. Observing hours among science programs are based on the quality of proposals. The telescope is currently oversubscribed, counting ongoing astronomy surveys, new astronomy projects, solar system observations, and atmospheric sciences programs. About 75 percent of astronomy users conduct their observing remotely via networked control software, while radar observations typically employ on-site users.

### **Management and Oversight**

- **AST, \$3.05 million:** AST funding will maintain basic operations costs and science programs in passive radio astronomy. As recommended by the 2006 AST Senior Review, AST funding for Arecibo has been gradually reduced.
- **AGS, \$3.03 million:** AGS funding will support basic operations costs and science programs in aeronomy and space physics, including space weather.
- **NSF Structure:** The lead NSF program officer in AST, in close cooperation with a program officer in AGS and in consultation with community representatives, provides ongoing oversight. The program officers make use of detailed annual program plans, long-range plans, quarterly technical and financial reports, and annual reports submitted by the management and operations awardee. They also attend awardee governance committee meetings, as appropriate. To address issues as they arise, program officers work closely with other NSF offices such as the Office of the General Counsel, the Division of Acquisition and Cooperative Support and the Large Facilities Office in the Office of Budget, Finance, and Award Management. AST and AGS program officers conduct periodic site visits and frequent, regular, teleconferences.
- **External Structure:** Management is via a cooperative agreement. In February 2018 NSF announced an

award to UCF to undertake formal transition activities leading to UCF assumption of full operations and management responsibilities for Arecibo Observatory. NSF is currently negotiating the operations and management award with UCF, including details of the external management and oversight structure.

- Reviews:
  - In January 2017 NSF issued a solicitation requesting proposals to provide continued operations and management of Arecibo for five years, but at reduced funding. Proposals received in response to this solicitation were afforded extensive NSF internal review together with formal review by a panel of external experts in observatory management and operations.
  - AST and AGS jointly conduct annual external reviews of Arecibo program plans; the most recent such review was held in January 2017.

### **Renewal/Recompetition/Termination**

The current cooperative agreement with SRI for the management of Arecibo was awarded on October 1, 2011, when SRI succeeded the previous managing organization. This followed a competitive process for a new five-year cooperative agreement, consistent with National Science Board policy. This agreement was in effect through September 30, 2016, and was extended through March 31, 2018. In January 2017 NSF issued a solicitation for continued operations and management of Arecibo Observatory. Following a thorough review process, in February 2018, NSF announced an award to UCF to undertake formal transition activities expected to lead to UCF assumption of full operations and management responsibilities. NSF is currently negotiating the full operations and management award with UCF. The duration of this award is expected to be five years.