

Arecibo Observatory
Consulting Party Meeting – July 6, 2017

Useful Section 106 Definitions:

Adverse Effect: a change to the characteristics that qualify a historic property for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.

Historic Property: Any resource, such as a building, structure, or historic district, included in or eligible for inclusion in the NRHP (note that this includes the 305-meter Radio Telescope and Supporting Towers at Arecibo Observatory).

Programmatic Agreement (PA): A document that records the terms and conditions agreed upon to resolve the potential adverse effects of a federal agency program or complex undertaking. Here, a PA is used to document the ways in which adverse effects are addressed because the result of the 2017 solicitation for new collaborators is undetermined and the needs of any new collaborator(s) are unknown.

Undertaking: A project, activity, or program funded in whole or in part by a federal agency.

Useful Links:

Description of the Section 106 process: <http://www.achp.gov/citizensguide.html>

Draft PA: https://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/env_impact_reviews/arecibo/arecibo_section106.jsp

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the undertaking?

The undertaking is defined as the National Science Foundation's (NSF's) proposed changes to the Arecibo Observatory operations due to funding constraints.

What is the reason for the undertaking?

NSF has identified the need to divest several facilities from its portfolio to retain the balance of capabilities needed to deliver the best performance on the key science of the present decade and beyond. Arecibo Observatory is one of the facilities identified for potential divestment. The need for NSF to reduce its participation in the Arecibo Observatory has been established through reviews and surveys conducted by members of the science community. At present, Arecibo Observatory serves a variety of scientific user communities in astronomy, aeronomy, and planetary science, and is funded for all three activities as well as an active education and public outreach program. The scientific community evaluations indicated, however, that the science capability of Arecibo Observatory is a lower priority than other science capabilities that NSF funds. In a funding-constrained environment, NSF must maintain a balanced research portfolio with the largest science return for the taxpayer dollar; therefore, the purpose of the undertaking is to evaluate proposed changes to operations at Arecibo Observatory that would substantially reduce NSF's contribution to the funding of Arecibo Observatory.

What is the timing of the undertaking?

NSF's 5-year cooperative agreement with SRI International, with sub-awards to Universities Space Research Association and the Universidad Metropolitana, expires on March 31, 2018. NSF must complete its environmental compliance, including its obligations under Section 106 of the NHPA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), prior to making a decision about any change in operations at Arecibo Observatory and prior to selecting any new collaborator(s). NSF must complete its

environmental compliance obligations by the end of August/early September if NSF is to be in the best posture to implement its Preferred Alternative through a new collaborator(s) as described below.

What is the Preferred Alternative for the undertaking?

Alternative 1, NSF's Preferred Alternative, would involve collaboration with interested parties for continued science-focused operations at Arecibo Observatory. Under this Alternative, NSF would reduce its funding of Arecibo Observatory and a new collaborator(s) would be responsible for future maintenance and upgrades. Under this Alternative, NSF could transfer or retain the property. Alternative 1 would retain the 305-meter Radio Telescope and Support Towers as well as buildings at Arecibo Observatory that are deemed necessary for continued scientific research.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative can only occur if a collaborator(s) comes forward with viable proposed plans to provide additional non-NSF funding in support of science-focused operations. Because the needs of any new collaborator(s) are not yet known, it is also unknown which, if any, buildings would be needed to support the collaborator(s) science-focused operations and which buildings would be identified for demolition under the Preferred Alternative. In order to consider all potential effects to historic properties, however, the Preferred Alternative includes potential demolition activities that could remove up to 26 buildings from the site (such as onsite housing, recreation facilities, and other buildings), which NSF determined would likely be unnecessary for a new collaborator(s) to carry-out science-focused operations. Operations after any potential demolition activities are completed would be comparable to current operations and would likely include the same number of employees. In an effort to seek new collaborators to continue science-based operations at Arecibo Observatory, NSF released a solicitation for proposals by potential collaborators and NSF is currently evaluating the response to that solicitation.

What has NSF done to reach out to the public?

NSF has notified, contacted, and/or consulted with agencies, Puerto Rican elected officials, individuals, and organizations during NSF's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Section 106 processes. Public disclosure and involvement regarding the undertaking included pre-assessment notification letters to agencies, social media announcements, website updates, scientific digests and blogs, newspaper public notices, and public scoping meetings (conducted on June 7, 2016 in San Juan and Arecibo).

The Draft EIS was published and distributed to federal, state, local, and private agencies, organizations, and individuals for review and comment, and it was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency. A Notice of Availability was announced in the *Federal Register* on November 1, 2016, the Draft EIS was posted on NSF's Division of Astronomical Sciences website, and NSF announced it the availability of the Draft EIS using social media. Public meetings were held on the Draft EIS (conducted November 16, 2017, in Arecibo and on November 17, 2016 in San Juan). A Section 106 consultation meeting was held after the Draft EIS public meetings (conducted on November 17, 2016 in San Juan), and a Section 106 (telephonic) consultation meeting with Consulting Parties was held (June 21, 2017). Both English and Spanish versions of media notifications and the materials distributed during the meetings were made available to the public. An English/Spanish interpreter was present during all in-person public meetings.

NSF prepared a Draft PA and sent it out to the Consulting Parties and interested members of the public on June 23, 2017 for public review and comment. The Draft PA was also posted on NSF's Division of Astronomical Sciences website for review and comment. Copies of the Draft PA will also be available at the Biblioteca Electrónica Pública Municipal Nicolás Nadal Barreto and the Archivo General y Biblioteca Nacional de Puerto Rico. The public review and comment period is now open for a 30-day period. Public comments on the Draft PA can be submitted via email at envcomp-AST@nsf.gov, with subject line "Arecibo Observatory", or through regular mail, to Ms. Elizabeth Pentecost, RE: Arecibo Observatory, National Science Foundation, Suite 1045, 4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22230. A Consulting Parties meeting, which is open to the public, is scheduled to be held on July 6, 2017 in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

What is a Consulting Party? How is a Consulting Party different from the public?

Consulting Party is a Section 106 term that refers to organizations and/or individuals with a demonstrated interest in the undertaking “due to the nature of their legal or economic relation to the undertaking or affected properties, or their concern with the undertaking’s effects on historic properties” (30 Code of Federal Regulations Part 800.2[5]). The participation of Consulting Parties is subject to approval by NSF. Consulting Parties are actively informed of and able to participate in the Section 106 process, including consultation meetings. The views of Consulting Parties are actively sought by NSF during the Section 106 consultation process.

Under Section 106, NSF must also consider the views of the public, particularly in determining ways to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse effects to historic properties. Comments are sought from the public through public meetings. In addition, NSF has used its outreach efforts associated with its NEPA process to involve the public in its Section 106 consultation process. For example, NSF included announcements of its Section 106 process when it published its Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the *Federal Register* and in its notices of public meetings. In addition, the public may attend any Consulting Parties meeting and provide comments to NSF regarding ways to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse effects associated with this undertaking.