



**NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
4201 WILSON BOULEVARD
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22230**

NSF 16-005

Dear Colleague Letter: Concepts for Future Operation of the Arecibo Observatory

October 26, 2015

Dear Colleague:

This Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) requests community responses on viable concepts for the future continued operation of the Arecibo Observatory. The Arecibo Observatory is a scientific research and education facility located in Puerto Rico, owned by the National Science Foundation (NSF). In 2011, NSF awarded a five-year Cooperative Agreement to SRI International (SRI), who together with Universities Space Research Association (USRA) and Universidad Metropolitana (UMET) formed the Arecibo Management Team to operate and maintain the Arecibo Observatory on behalf of the NSF. The Arecibo Observatory enables research in three scientific disciplines: Space and Atmospheric Sciences, Radio Astronomy, and Solar System Radar Studies. A key component of the Arecibo Observatory research facility is a 305-meter diameter, fixed, spherical reflector, located on approximately 120 acres of U.S. Government-owned land in Barrio Esperanza, Arecibo, Puerto Rico, 10 miles inland from the city of Arecibo. The Arecibo Observatory infrastructure includes instrumentation for radio and radar astronomy, ionospheric physics, office and laboratory buildings, a heavily utilized visitor and education facility, and lodging facilities for visiting scientists. More information is available at <http://www.naic.edu>.

The purpose of this DCL is to request viable concepts for the future of the Arecibo Observatory, specifically including strategies and goals for continued operations that involve a substantially reduced funding commitment from NSF. The Arecibo Observatory serves the interests of a diverse group of stakeholders, all of which are keenly interested in the Arecibo Observatory's continued long-term productivity and return on investment. As the owner, the National Science Foundation is now conducting a feasibility study that will help inform the scope of the necessary environmental reviews for any change to operations of the Observatory or possible transfer of title of the Observatory to another party.

In 2012, the NSF Division of Astronomical Sciences' Portfolio Review Committee recommended that "continued AST involvement in Arecibo ... be re-evaluated later in the decade in light of the science opportunities and budget forecasts at that time." (Report available at http://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/ast_portfolio_review.jsp). This DCL follows up on that recommendation, in light of the upcoming expiration of the initial 5-year cooperative agreement with SRI. Responses to this DCL are not intended to be limited in any way or directed toward a specific solution in terms of management or operations concepts. NSF is seeking responses based on both traditional single-organization management concepts, along with less-traditional, multi-partner concepts, possibly involving joint public-private partnerships. NSF remains open to concepts involving some level of NSF participation. Responses may also include concepts involving the assumption of title and ownership of the Arecibo Observatory by the responder, including all ancillary facilities and infrastructure.

Responses should include the following:

- A clear description of the operations and activities an interested party would propose to conduct at the Arecibo Observatory, along with a description of which current scientific and educational activities would and would not continue to be conducted.
- A conceptual business, financial, and managerial outline for the Arecibo Observatory, including a clear description of how much and for how long NSF financial support and participation would be sought to make this plan viable.
- If applicable, an outline of the ways and means of effectively planning and managing the receipt of the title transfer for parts or all of the Arecibo Observatory, including ancillary facilities and infrastructure to the responder.

Please submit responses by 15 January 2016. Responses to this request do not bind NSF to any further or specific actions related to this topic. This DCL is not a formal solicitation for proposals, and conveys neither a financial commitment nor a reflection of a final decision of the disposition of the Arecibo Observatory. To the extent that the sender plans to provide any information that it considers proprietary, such status must be unambiguously communicated and clearly marked.

Responses, along with questions and comments, should be submitted in electronic form, via e-mail, to the Arecibo Observatory Program officer of the NSF Division of Astronomical Sciences, Dr. Ralph Gaume (rgaume@nsf.gov).

Sincerely,

James S. Ulvestad
Division Director, MPS/AST

Paul B. Shepson
Division Director, GEO/AGS