

Participatory Exploration for Inspiration and Education (12)
Engaging Citizens: Results and Future Concepts (1)

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SHARING THE ADVENTURE WITH THE PUBLIC: THE VALUE AND EXCITEMENT OF "GRAND QUESTIONS" OF SPACE SCIENCE AND EXPLORATION - REPORT OF A SPACE STUDIES BOARD WORKSHOP

Abstract

On November 8-10, 2010, the Space Studies Board (SSB) of the National Research Council held a two-and-a-half day public workshop focused on exploring key questions that are a major focus of the nation's space research program and identifying effective ways for conveying to the public the value and excitement of what we learn from addressing these topics

To carry out these tasks, the workshop considered five "Grand Questions" that encompass many of the principal intellectual objectives of the nation's past, present and future activities in space science and exploration. It also examined ways to best articulate and best inform the public about achievements and activities that NASA undertakes in addressing these questions. This included potential improvements in communication efforts – especially the use of social media – as a means of enhancing the level of public understanding and "ownership" of NASA programs in science and exploration. A key aspect was how to sustain public interest in and involvement with NASA science and exploration efforts that might take many years, or even decades, to unfold.

The five "Grand Questions" were: Understanding the Universe: How Did It Begin and How Is It Evolving? Are We Alone? Understanding the Solar System: How Did It Begin and How Is It Evolving? The Earth: Will It Remain an Hospitable Home for Humanity in the Future? What Could the Future Hold for Humans in Space?

A major goal of the workshop was encouraging dialogue between scientists and professional communicators. The program was therefore structured to begin with a keynote address by a well known "space communicator." That was followed by six "Grand Question" sessions involving presentations by noted space scientists and dialogue between these scientists and professional communicators, and two "Communications" sessions with presentations from professional communicators and dialogue between these specialists and space scientists.

This paper presents a review of highlights of the workshop report that summarizes the discussions that took place. In keeping with the overall conference theme, particular focus is placed on those portions of the report relating to human spaceflight and robotic precursor missions. Where appropriate, lessons learned from other portions of the workshop are included.