

41st SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) – The
Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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THE LONG VIEW: SUSTAINING MULTIGENERATIONAL SCIENCE

Abstract

The modern scientific search for extraterrestrial life is in a time of transition: the first generation of professional SETI astronomers and exobiologists are now planning for a potentially multi-generational search. This paper will examine some historical examples of cultural and scientific ‘long projects’ – including some which have been concluded, and others which have not – to demonstrate a few principles and questions about multi-generational endeavours. There are, of course, practical questions of institutional stability, as well as trends in science, but another significant question concerns the sustainability of anticipation itself: how long can a community stay in an active mode of prognostication, always waiting for something big to happen?