

Preamble

GSFC's Astrophysics Division manages the Guest Observer Facility (GOF) of 6 operating missions (Fermi, Swift, NICER, NuSTAR, XMM-Newton, and TESS). While retaining individual identities for practical purposes (operations and budget management), all the GOF Teams work in synergy, taking decisions together and consulting each other on best practices.

While each GOF Team has limited resources and thus can only have limited impact for DEIA, together we can make a difference, both internally (for our Team members) and externally (for the community). Our way forward is to pool our resources together to support a few well-designed activities that benefit all of our Teams and the communities we serve. We believe that by uniting our efforts and resources we can have maximum impact, and as such, we developed together a unique Implementation Plan. This Plan has been adopted by all 6 GOFs, and will be included in each GSFC proposal, as previously agreed by the APD Director.

Introduction: DEIA and our Teams

On June 25, 2021, President Biden released Executive Order 14035: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) of the Federal Workforce, requiring Agencies to create and implement plans to diversify the workforce and foster a more equitable and inclusive environment. We look at this Executive Order as a unique opportunity to reflect on the value of DEIA in the field of Astrophysics in general, and for our Teams in particular, and identify ways we can do better by our staff and the people we serve.

All members of the GOFs come from different life paths. This diversity of background and experience leads to the unique way each of us thinks. A diversity of thought and life experience leads to a variety of approaches to problem solving, and thus to new and innovative ways to do things. However, diversity begs inclusion to be a catalyst for progress. We interpret Inclusion as the safety of each individual to contribute to the Team mission as the person they are, authentically. Equity and Accessibility speak to providing each member of the Team with the resources they need to succeed in their job, which may be different for different individuals (Equity), and to allow each person to work at their own pace in the safe physical and emotional environment that best suit them (Accessibility).

Our Teams have been working together for years and are well established. They include a variety of career stages, genders, nationalities, LGBTQ+ identities, cultural backgrounds, and physical abilities. While we have been operating successfully for a number of years, nevertheless we do acknowledge that we can do better, and look forward to feedback to our plans by this Review Committee.

Planned DEIA Activities

Few of us are experts in DEIA matters, having been trained as astrophysicists, programmers, engineers and managers, and having a full plate of mission-related duties. As explained above, we decided that the most impactful approach to DEIA is to pool our resources together to pursue common activities. We will hire a DEIA professional, either full or part-time, to work closely with us as a mentor and guide us in a few selected activities, and to provide guidance for GOF leadership to create supportive and inclusive teams.

We identified the following projects that address DEIA matters both in an inward- and outward-looking way:

- Improve communication within the Teams and among the Teams. Paramount for Team dynamics is that each member be allowed to bring themselves as they are, be heard and valued, and contribute to the Team, and also that Team members learn to value each other. The DEIA mentor will act as an observer, providing feedback for improvement in the way we relate to each other;
- Provide annual training in DEIA to all members of the Teams, held by the mentor or by an entity designated by them, to address gaps in our knowledge and bolster awareness;
- With the help of the mentor, develop a community workshop on tips and tools for proposing to NASA that will build on best practices for inclusion and accessibility, and will take the event to conferences and workshops, especially for under-represented communities (SACNAS, NSBP, ...). As part of the workshop, selected PI-led missions such as NICER and Swift will make some modest amount of observing time available for “real life” training in proposal writing and observing to undergraduate and graduate students especially from HBCUs and MSIs. This will also provide the students with the ability to lead their own observing programs and write papers;
- Highlight regularly early-career proposers as currently done by some of us (e.g., TESS), in newsletters and on the mission Website.

Conclusion

The plan above is just the beginning. As we proceed along the journey of incorporating DEIA awareness in everything we do, we will undoubtedly discover other avenues to contribute to a better environment for our Teams and the communities we serve. We remain committed to moving forward with awareness, humility, and curiosity, guided by our DEIA mentor.