NASA SBIR 2007 Phase I Solicitation

S2  Advanced Telescope Systems

The NASA Science Missions Directorate seeks technology for cost-effective high-performance advanced space telescopes for astrophysics and Earth science. Astrophysics applications require large aperture light-weight highly reflecting mirrors, deployable large structures and innovative metrology, control of unwanted radiation for high-contrast optics, precision formation flying for synthetic aperture telescopes, and cryogenic optics to enable far infrared telescopes. A few of the new astrophysics telescopes and their subsystems will require operation at cryogenic temperatures as cold as 4-degrees Kelvin. This topic will consider technologies necessary to enable future telescopes and observatories collecting electromagnetic bands, ranging from UV to millimeter waves, and also include gravity waves. The subtopics will consider all technologies associated with the collection and combination of observable signals. Earth science requires modest apertures in the 2 to 4 meter size category that are cost effective. New technologies in innovative mirror materials, such as silicon, silicon carbide and nanolaminates, innovative structures, including nano-technology, and wavefront sensing and control are needed to build telescope for Earth science that have the potential to cost between $50 to $150M.

Subtopics

S2.01 Precision Spacecraft Formations for Telescope Systems

Lead Center: JPL
Participating Center(s): GSFC

This subtopic seeks hardware and software technologies necessary to establish, maintain, and operate precision spacecraft formations to a level that enables cost effective large aperture and separated spacecraft optical telescopes and interferometers. Also sought are technologies (analysis, algorithms, and testbeds) to enable detailed analysis, synthesis, modeling, and visualization of such distributed systems.

Formation flight can synthesize large effective telescope apertures through, multiple, collaborative, smaller telescopes in a precision formation. Large effective apertures can also be achieved by tiling curved segments to form an aperture larger than can be achieved in a single launch, for deep-space high resolution imaging of faint astrophysical sources. These formations require the capability for autonomous precision alignment and synchronized maneuvers, reconfigurations, and collision avoidance. The spacecraft also require onboard capability...
for optimal path planning and time optimal maneuver design and execution.

Innovations are solicited for: (a) development of nanometer to sub-nanometer metrology for measuring inter-spacecraft range and/or bearing for space telescopes and interferometers (b) development of combined cm-to-nanometer-level precision formation flying control of numerous spacecraft and their optics to enable large baseline, sparse aperture UV/optical and X-ray telescopes and interferometers for ultra-high angular resolution imagery. Proposals addressing staged-control experiments which combine coarse formation control with fine-level wavefront sensing based control are encouraged.

Innovations are also solicited for distributed spacecraft systems in the following areas:

- Distributed, multi-timing, high fidelity simulations;
- Formation modeling techniques;
- Precision guidance and control architectures and design methodologies;
- Centralized and decentralized formation estimation;
- Distributed sensor fusion;
- RF and optical precision metrology systems;
- Formation sensors;
- Precision microthrusters/actuators;
- Autonomous reconfigurable formation techniques;
- Optimal, synchronized, maneuver design methodologies;
- Collision avoidance mechanisms;
- Formation management and station keeping.

S2.02 Proximity Glare Suppression for Astronomical Coronagraphy

Lead Center: JPL

This subtopic addresses the unique problem of imaging and spectroscopic characterization of faint astrophysical objects that are located within the obscuring glare of much brighter stellar sources and innovative advanced wavefront sensing and control for cost-effective space telescopes. Examples include planetary systems beyond our
own, the detailed inner structure of galaxies with very bright nuclei, binary star formation, and stellar evolution. Contrast ratios of one million to ten billion over an angular spatial scale of 0.05-1.5 arcsec are typical of these objects. Achieving a very low background requires control of both scattered and diffracted light. The failure to control either amplitude or phase fluctuations in the optical train severely reduces the effectiveness of starlight cancellation schemes.

This innovative research focuses on advances in coronagraphic instruments, starlight cancellation instruments, and potential occulting technologies that operate at visible and infrared wavelengths. The ultimate application of these instruments is to operate in space as part of a future observatory mission. Much of the scientific instrumentation used in future NASA observatories for the astrophysical sciences will require control of unwanted radiation (thermal and scattered) across a modest field of view. The performance and observing efficiency of astrophysics instruments, however, must be greatly enhanced. The instrument components are expected to offer much higher optical throughput, larger fields of view, and better detector performance. The wavelengths of primary interest extend from the visible to the thermal infrared. Measurement techniques include imaging, photometry, spectroscopy, and polarimetry. There is interest in component development, and innovative instrument design, as well as in the fabrication of subsystem devices to include, but not limited to, the following areas:

### Starlight Suppression Technologies

- Advanced starlight canceling coronagraphic instrument concepts;
- Advanced aperture apodization and aperture shaping techniques;
- Pupil plane masks for interferometry;
- Advanced apodization mask or occulting spot fabrication technology controlling smooth density gradients to 10^-4 with spatial resolutions ~1 µm, low dispersion, and low dependence of phase on optical density;
- Metrology for detailed evaluation of compact, deep density apodizing masks, Lyot stops, and other types of graded and binary mask elements. Development of a system to measure spatial optical density, phase in homogeneity, scattering, spectral dispersion, thermal variations, and to otherwise estimate the accuracy of masks and stops is needed;
- Interferometric starlight cancellation instruments and techniques to include aperture synthesis and single input beam combination strategies;
- Single mode fiber filtering from visible to 20 µm wavelength;
- Methods of polarization control and polarization apodization; and
- Components and methods to insure amplitude uniformity in both coronagraphs and interferometers, specifically materials, processes, and metrology to insure coating uniformity.

### Wavefront Control Technologies

- Development of small stroke, high precision, deformable mirrors (DM) and associated driving electronics
scalable to $10^4$ or more actuators (both to further the state-of-the-art towards flight-like hardware and to explore novel concepts). Multiple DM technologies in various phases of development and processes are encouraged to ultimately improve the state-of-the-art in deformable mirror technology. Process improvements are needed to improve repeatability, yield, and performance precision of current devices;

- Development of instruments to perform broad-band sensing of wavefronts and distinguish amplitude and phase in the wavefront;

- Adaptive optics actuators, integrated mirror/actuator programmable deformable mirror;

- Reliability and qualification of actuators and structures in deformable mirrors to eliminate or mitigate single actuator failures;

- Multiplexer development for electrical connection to deformable mirrors that has ultra-low power dissipation;

- High precision wavefront error sensing and control techniques to improve and advance coronagraphic imaging performance; and

- Highly reflecting broadband coatings.

S2.03 Precision Deployable Optical Structures and Metrology

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): GSFC

Planned future NASA Missions in astrophysics, such as the Single Aperture Far-IR (SAFIR) telescope, Life Finder, and Submillimeter Probe of the Evolution of Cosmic Structure (SPECS), and the UV Optical Imager (UVOIR) require 10 - 30 m class cost effective telescopes that are diffraction limited at wavelengths from the visible to the far IR, and operate at temperatures from 4 - 300 K. The desired areal density is 1 - 10 kg/m$^2$. Static and dynamic wavefront error tolerances may be achieved through passive means (e.g., via a high stiffness system) or through active control. Potential architecture implementations must package into an existing launch volume, deploy and be self-aligning to the micron level. The target space environment is expected to be L2.

This topic solicits proposals to develop enabling, cost effective component and subsystem technology for these telescopes. Research areas of particular interest include precision deployable structures and metrology (i.e., innovative active or passive deployable primary or secondary support structures); innovative concepts for packaging fully integrated (i.e., including power distribution, sensing, and control components); distributed and localized actuation systems; deployment packaging and mechanisms; active control distributed on or within the structure (downstream corrective and adaptive optics are not included in this topic area); actuator systems for alignment of reflector panels (order of cm stroke actuators, lightweight, submicron dynamic range, nanometer stability); mechanical, inflatable, or other deployable technologies; new thermally-stable materials (CTE).

Also of interest are innovative metrology systems for direct measurement of the optical elements or their supporting structure; requirements for micron level absolute and subnanometer relative metrology for tens of points on the
primary mirror; measurement of the metering truss; and innovative systems which minimize complexity, mass, power and cost.

The goal for this effort is to mature technologies that can be used to fabricate 20 m class, lightweight, ambient or cryogenic flight-qualified telescope primary mirror systems. Proposals to fabricate demonstration components and subsystems with direct scalability to flight systems (concept described in the proposal) will be given preference. The target launch volume and expected disturbances, along with the estimate of system performance, should be included in the discussion. A successful proposal shows a path toward a Phase 2 delivery of demonstration hardware on the scale of 3 m for characterization.

S2.04 Optical Devices for Starlight Detection and Wavefront Analysis

Lead Center: MSFC
Participating Center(s): GSFC, JPL

This subtopic solicits technology for collecting and controlling star light with advanced optical telescopes and telescope arrays. This topic includes innovative optical subsystems, devices and components that directly collect and process optical signals and images for all regions of the electromagnetic spectrum from X-ray to UV to Visible to Far-IR/Sub-MM. Pre-detection technologies of interest include capabilities to preprocess or analyze an optical wave front or signal to extract time-dependent, spectral, polarization and spatial information from scenes or signals prior to detection. Specific technology area of interest include high reflectance UV coatings and uniform polarization coatings for all wavelengths; high angular resolution imaging enabled via large-baseline segmented-aperture telescopes and sparse aperture telescopes/interferometers; component-level technology needed to enable the characterization and combination of wavefronts from multiple apertures. Innovative technology to integrate, assemble, align and control test large aperture segmented mirrors for x-ray, ambient and cryogenic applications.

Proposed effort must address technical need of a recognized future NASA space science mission, science measurement objective or science sensor for a Discovery, Explorer, Beyond Einstein, Origins, GOESS, New Millennium, Landmark-Discovery, or Vision mission. Specific missions of interest include the following: Constellation-X (http://constellation.gsfc.nasa.gov/); Terrestrial Planet Finder (http://planetquest.jpl.nasa.gov/TPF/tpf_index.cfm); Single Aperture Far-Infrared (http://safr.jpl.nasa.gov/technologies.shtml).

Proposed effort should be conducted to demonstrate technical feasibility during Phase 1 and show a path toward a Phase 2 breadboard or prototype demonstration.
Proposals in the following areas are specifically solicited:

- Optical coatings: broad-band polarization preserving and polarizing for UV to Far-IR/Sub-MM; high-reflectivity EUV; large area, high acceptance angle narrow-band optical filters; broad-band wide-acceptance angle UV anti-reflection on PMMA substrates; environmentally stable protected silver.

- High throughput, radiation hard, large area, X-ray imaging devices such as Fresnel Zone plates and masks.

- Innovative mounting/support and metrology/control technologies to integrate, assemble, align and control large aperture lightweight low-cost segmented mirrors for x-ray, ambient and cryogenic normal incidence applications - also, systems with extreme alignment tolerances such as PIAA.

- Techniques to mitigate optical surface errors includes phase retrieval and wavefront sensing and control techniques and instrumentation, optical systems with high-precision controls, active and/or adaptive mirrors, shape control of deformable telescope mirrors, and image stabilization systems; techniques to sense/control segmented primary mirrors.

- Techniques to combine beams for wavelength-resolved fringe measurements from a large number of independent apertures with flat response over a broad wavelength range.

S2.05 Optics Manufacturing and Metrology for Telescope Optical Surfaces

Lead Center: GSFC
Participating Center(s): JPL, MSFC

This year's subtopic focuses primarily on manufacturing and metrology of optical surfaces, especially for very small or very large and/or thin optics. Missions of interest include, but are not limited to, Constellation-X (http://constellation.gsfc.nasa.gov/), TPF (http://planetquest.jpl.nasa.gov/TPF/tpf_index.cfm), and SAFIR (http://safir.jpl.nasa.gov/technologies.shtml). Optical systems currently being researched for these missions are large area aspheres, requiring accurate figuring and polishing across six orders of magnitude in period (i.e., 1st and 2nd order errors through micro-roughness). Technologies are sought that will enhance the figure quality of optics in any range as long as the process does not introduce artifacts in other ranges (i.e., mm-period polishing should not introduce waviness errors at the 20 mm or 0.05 mm periods in the power spectral density). Also, novel metrological solutions that can measure figure errors over a large fraction of the PSD range are sought, especially techniques and instrumentation that can perform measurements while the optic is mounted to the figuring/polishing machine.

By the end of a Phase 2 program, technologies must be developed to the point where the technique or instrument can dovetail into an existing optics manufacturing facility producing optics at the R&D stage. Metrology instruments must have 10 nm or better surface height resolution and span at least 3 orders of magnitude in lateral spatial
frequency.

Examples of technologies and instruments of interest include:

- Interferometric nulling optics for very shallow conical optics used in x-ray telescopes (segmented systems commonly span 60 degrees in azimuth and 200 mm axial length and cone angles vary from 0.1 to 1 degree);
- Low stress metrology mounts that can hold very thin optics without introducing mounting distortion;
- Low normal force figuring/polishing systems operating in the 1 mm to 50 mm period range with minimal impact at significantly smaller and larger period ranges;
- In situ metrology systems that can measure optics and provide feedback to figuring/polishing instruments without removing the part from the spindle;
- Innovative mirror substrate materials or manufacturing methods that produce thin mirror substrates that are stiffer and/or lighter than existing materials or methods;
- Extreme aspheric and/or anamorphic optics for pupil intensity amplitude apodization (PIAA).