



NASA SBIR 2018 Phase I Solicitation

S2.01 Proximity Glare Suppression for Astronomical Direct Detection

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): ARC, GSFC

Technology Area: TA8 Science Instruments, Observatories & Sensor Systems

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. 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 near infrared wavelengths. The ultimate application of these instruments is to operate in space as part of a future observatory mission. 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:

- Image plane hybrid metal/dielectric, and polarization apodization masks in linear and circular patterns.
- Transmissive holographic masks for diffraction control and PSF apodization.
- Sharp-edged, low-scatter pupil plane masks.
- Low-scatter, low-reflectivity, sharp, flexible edges for control of scatter in starshades.
- Systems to measure spatial optical density, phase inhomogeneity, scattering, spectral dispersion, thermal variations, and to otherwise estimate the accuracy of high-dynamic range apodizing masks.
- Pupil remapping technologies to achieve beam apodization.
- Techniques to characterize highly aspheric optics.
- Methods to distinguish the coherent and incoherent scatter in a broad band speckle field.
- Coherent fiber bundles consisting of up to 10,000 fibers with lenslets on both input and output side, such that both spatial and temporal coherence is maintained across the fiber bundle for possible wavefront/amplitude control through the fiber bundle.

Wavefront Measurement and Control Technologies:

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- Small stroke, high precision, deformable mirrors and associated driving electronics scalable to 10,000 or more actuators (both to further the state-of-the-art towards flight-like hardware and to explore novel concepts). Multiple deformable mirror 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.
 - Instruments to perform broad-band sensing of wavefronts and distinguish amplitude and phase in the wavefront.
 - Integrated mirror/actuator programmable deformable mirror.
 - Multiplexers with ultra-low power dissipation for electrical connection to deformable mirrors.
 - Low-order wavefront sensors for measuring wavefront instabilities to enable real-time control and post-processing of aberrations.
 - Thermally and mechanically insensitive optical benches and systems.
 - Optical Coating and Measurement Technologies:
 - Instruments capable of measuring polarization cross-talk and birefringence to parts per million.
 - Highly reflecting, uniform, broadband coatings for large (> 1 m diameter) optics.
 - Polarization-insensitive coatings for large optics.
 - Methods to measure the spectral reflectivity and polarization uniformity across large optics.
 - Methods to apply carbon nanotube coatings on the surfaces of the coronagraphs for broadband suppression from visible to NIR.

Other:

- Methods to fabricate diffractive patterns on large optics to generate astrometric reference frames.
- Artificial star and planet point sources, with $1e10$ dynamic range and uniform illumination of an f/25 optical system, working in the visible and near infrared.
- Deformable, calibrated, collimating source to simulate the telescope front end of a coronagraphic system undergoing thermal deformations.
- Technologies for high contrast integral field spectroscopy, in particular for microlens arrays with or without accompanying mask arrays, working in the visible and NIR (0.4 - 1.8 microns), with lenslet separations in the 0.1 - 0.4 mm range, in formats of $\sim 140 \times 140$ lenslets.