Program Scientist Opportunity in the Planetary Science Division at NASA Headquarters

NASA's Science Mission Directorate has an immediate need for one or more scientists with expertise in planetary science to serve as Program Scientists in the Planetary Science Division at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC. The Division is responsible for the scientific exploration of our solar system and for improving our understanding of planets. These opportunities are being made available under the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA).

NASA Program Scientists tackle a wide variety of challenges. These include: developing, operating, and maintaining Research & Analysis grants programs; serving as the Headquarters scientific lead for one or more disciplines in Planetary Science; and helping implement and communicate the Planetary Science Division's strategic goals. Program scientists can have substantial influence on strategic planning and can help shape the long-term scientific direction of programs that they oversee. NASA is offering a unique opportunity for scientists to gain insight into Planetary Science policy and programs, to better understand the proposal review process, and to run scientific programs enabling community-wide positive impact.

The initial IPA appointment will be for up to two (2) years, with the possibility of reappointment up to a total of six (6) years. The Intergovernmental Personnel Act provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and state and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations; all applicants must be from an IPA-eligible organization.

The time spent at NASA Headquarters allows visiting scientists excellent career growth: some return to their home institutions to continue academic research, while others move on to management and leadership positions in the Federal government, academia, at observatories, or in the non-profit sector. Training and mentoring programs are available, on both a formal and informal basis, which further enable our visiting scientists to advance their careers.

It is preferable for most Program Scientists in the Planetary Science Division to have at least 5 years of post-Ph.D. experience. The ideal candidate will be skilled at working in a collaborative team environment; will be able to adapt to work simultaneously on numerous programs; and will be able to foster productive relationships with both colleagues, the planetary science community, and the American people. Disciplinary expertise in one or more areas of planetary science is essential, but the ability to place this knowledge in the broader context of planetary science is equally important for the success of the Division's programs.

Applicant Eligibility

Not every employee of a non-Federal entity is eligible to participate in the IPA program. The following lists indicate which employees of eligible non-Federal entities are eligible and which are not eligible to participate in the IPA program:

Eligible:

• Employees of non-Federal entities, provided that they occupy a career position and have been with the entity for at least 90 days.

• If an employee changes from one non-Federal entity to another, they do not have to begin a new 90-day period, provided that both organizations are eligible to participate in the IPA program.

• Since non-Federal entities do not always use the precise terms that are used in the Federal Government, it is important to examine the actual situation. For example, a university professor may not be called permanent, but may have worked at an institution for many years and is expected to continue working there. In such a case, the individual would be eligible to participate.

Not Eligible:

- Federal, State or local government employees serving under time-limited, temporary, or term appointment, non-career or limited SES appointments, or Schedule C appointments;
- Elected Federal, State or local government officials;
- Members of the uniformed military services and the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and
- Students employed in research, graduate, or teaching assistant, and similar temporary positions.

Conflicts of interest

Duties and responsibilities to be performed for NASA must take into account possible conflicts of interest that may arise as a result of the assignee’s continued employment at their home institution. Before selection of an assignee, SMD will consider the particular matters on which the assignee would work, the interest of the assignee's home institution in those matters, and how the assignee's participation may affect the home institution's interest. SMD will also consider whether the applicant is involved in any outside activities that may create additional conflicts. These conflicts of interest arise as part of the Program Scientist’s role in the proposal review process and policy implementations that may affect future procurements.