

Report on a Meeting among the Division of Astronomical Sciences of the National Science Foundation, the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, the Giant Magellan Project, and the Thirty Meter Telescope Project

August 1, 2008

Following the recommendations of the 2001 Decadal Survey Report *Astronomy and Astrophysics in the New Millennia* two major U.S. consortia undertook design studies with the objective of constructing a new generation of cutting edge ground based telescopes. These consortia, the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project and the Giant Magellan Telescope (GMT) project, have both included a significant segment of the U.S. community through their institutional membership; have incorporated important international partners; and both have stated their strong desire for a public partnership that would provide the general U.S. community with access to these telescopes.

In recognition of the priority of the recommendation to construct a Giant Segmented Mirror Telescope (GSMT) in the 2001 Decadal Survey, The National Science Foundation, in consultation with AURA/NOAO and the two projects, designed what it felt was the most productive approach to developing a GSMT program in a manner that best serves U.S. astronomy, capitalizes on the basic purpose of the national observatory, preserves the strength of the non-federal investment in the development of the next generation of optical/infrared telescopes in the U.S, and assures a fair and balanced approach to both projects.

A joint meeting of the NSF, AURA/NOAO, and the GMT and TMT projects on August 1, 2008 affirmed the strong intention of the two projects to build these telescopes, and the interest of the NSF in supporting the science of the GSMT and access for the US community, provided that it retains a high priority in the upcoming Decadal Survey. All parties agreed that a Federal/private partnership is required if the wider astronomical community (optical, radio, sub-mm, x-ray, IR) is to have access to this next generation of extremely large telescopes. The 2001 Decadal Survey articulated a goal for a public share equivalent to half of an equivalent full telescope. This remains a desirable objective.

AURA/NOAO, TMT, and GMT have agreed to proceed with actions that can solidify the support of the U.S. community through its Decadal Survey process, and that of the international partners through their respective processes. AURA/NOAO and the NSF will continue to work with the two projects, subject to community review, to support the technology and designs as they are developed. All parties are committed to exploring how to structure one or more public-private partnerships in a manner and at a pace that would enable Federal participation on a schedule consistent with the Federal budget process while not delaying the completion of project development and initiation of project construction as non-Federal funding permits.