

Major research facilities: Possible roles for APS, other societies

During 1984, the year that I was president of APS, the Society's representative bodies considered what roles APS might take in dealing with issues of funding major research facilities while ensuring the overall balance of the physics research enterprise. These issues and possible APS roles were discussed in depth by the Panel on Public Affairs and the APS executive committee, who presented reports to the APS council where the discussion continued. In this editorial I would like to share a summary of their conclusions concerning appropriate APS roles. Because the Council discussions are continuing during 1985, I would also like to encourage discussion among the APS membership and feedback to the APS governing bodies. On a wider scene, other AIP member societies might want to join in the discussion.

In discussing roles, one should keep in mind the objectives of APS. Like other member societies of the American Institute of Physics, APS is chartered to address the advancement and diffusion of knowledge in physics. To some extent, physics societies also address the physics-related concerns of their members. To fulfill their objectives, the societies foster the gathering and dissemination of physics-related information among the physics community, the technical public, the general public, their representatives and leaders.

In the past, APS has not been involved in setting research priorities for physics, nor has it taken stands on specific research proposals. Instead, APS has promoted the health and unity of physics. Also, APS traditionally has endorsed a national policy that encourages physicists through their universities and laboratories to prepare proposals and subject them to peer review. I believe that these policies are appropriate and I recommend that they continue. In fact, Robert Marshak, another former president, and I have been highly vocal during the past two years (PHYSICS TODAY, October 1984, page 121) about the importance of peer review as one input prior to funding decisions on major facilities.

The recent discussions of POPA, the APS executive committee and the APS council have identified three roles for APS in addressing the issues raised by major physics research facilities:

- ▶ Promote information exchange and discussion about major research facilities among physicists in the various subdisciplines and among APS divisions. In this role, APS would organize workshops and symposia at APS-sponsored meetings and would from time to time suggest articles in PHYSICS TODAY and other periodicals. The purpose would be to acquaint members of the physics community with research opportunities and needs in

their own and other physics subdisciplines. This special issue of PHYSICS TODAY exemplifies such a role in information exchange.

- ▶ Facilitate information exchange among decision-making bodies, proponents of facilities and the physics community at large. APS would work with existing expert panels and arrange special briefings in instances where the resources of APS could facilitate information exchange.

- ▶ Remain abreast of governmental decision processes and make best efforts to ensure that such processes are handled fairly, with proper attention given to the balance of physics research as a whole. APS officers would be available for comment on the fairness of the decision-making process and for advice on the achievement of balance within the physics research enterprise. Thus the discussion of the representative bodies highlighted traditional APS roles in promoting and facilitating information exchange and also reaffirmed the importance of peer review in the decision-making process. In addition, a new element arose—the need to prevent gross imbalance in the physics research enterprise, which could result as major new research facilities are funded. If the integrity of the decision-making process were jeopardized or the internal balance of physics research were threatened, the APS council, its elected governing body, could consider steps beyond its traditional roles and examine measures to restore a healthy decision-making process. I believe other AIP member societies might also want to take similar action.

In this issue of PHYSICS TODAY and in special facilities-related symposia at APS-sponsored meetings during 1985, we will feature several topics: research opportunities in physics, major facilities requirements in the various physics subfields, and the needs of small groups at universities and research centers. We hope that you find the presentations interesting, well-balanced and helpful.

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