

February 11, 2025

NOTICE: This is a statement by Planetary Science Institute CEO Mark V. Sykes, and reflects the values and principles that guide the daily management of and planning for this Institute under his leadership.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Are Important for the Workplace and Science

To the American Public and Government Officials:

I would like to share a positive perspective of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility from the context of a science institute. At a time when these principles are being purged by our government from a large swath of federal programs, you should know they actually advance science, thereby advancing the interests of our country, and are important for the workplace. In the course of this, I would also like to take this opportunity to show you that scientists share much of your experiences and backgrounds as people, and something about the process of science itself.

The Planetary Science Institute takes pride in the accomplishments and discoveries of our scientists as they pursue our mission of exploring the Solar System and solar systems around other stars, pursuing questions of origins, life, and how everything works.

Our scientists are highly trained, highly skilled, and are supported by dedicated administrative and support staff that are likewise deeply experienced and remarkable. We open our doors widely to all those who are passionate about pursuing this work and sharing it with the scientific community and general public.

This work is not for the faint of heart, as it is supported through openly competed and limited sources of funding primarily from NASA and other agencies. To maximize our success as an institute in this context, we seek to attract people from all walks of life.

Our institute and its mission are apolitical. Our scientists range from strong supporters of the current administration to those who deeply oppose it to those who don't particularly care or have other political interests. We have scientists of a broad range of national origins, race, and gender identities. Our scientists are Evangelical Christians, Jews, Mormons, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, and other religious and non-religious persuasions. Some are veterans. Our scientists have diverse personalities and a wide range of interpersonal skills. Some have physical challenges, some are neurodiverse, and everyone comes from a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds. This is diversity. We value it. We encourage it. We want it.

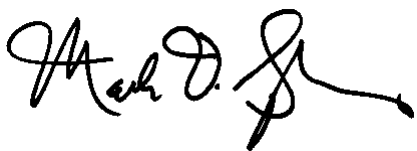
Diversity is a strength of our Institute and a strength to our science. How can that be? Science depends not just on technical skill and knowledge, but more importantly on imagination. We use our imagination when identifying questions raised by our observations of the universe around us, then gaining new understanding in answering those questions, and then to determine how we can challenge our newfound understanding. Scientific insights can spring from a recent research paper, a conversation with a friend, a religious experience, a dream, or watching a basketball game. As we work together, we share our ideas from our different perspectives and experiences. The vast range of insights facilitated by increasing diversity maximizes the quality and range of the science that we produce. This is true for all science.

We want to retain our talented employees and enable them to engage in meaningful work, so it is important to provide a positive, engaging and supportive work environment. To realize this, we commit to being a community dedicated to excellence in our work and helping each other to be successful in our professional and even personal endeavors. We value each other and our families. We value everyone's opinions – even when we do not agree with them. We listen to each other. We are honest with each other. We always treat each other fairly with dignity and respect. We acknowledge when a person has been wronged and work to rectify it justly. This is equity.

Science is a naturally inclusive human endeavor unconfined to a single institution or profession. It is largely a cooperative, even global enterprise, inclusive of many communities. Inclusion supports our desire for growing diversity to add to what we have. We also want to create more diversity by reaching out to the general public, including communities of people that have little participation in our field or even science in general. We want to inspire them, teach them, and hopefully motivate them, sometimes by giving them some participatory experience in our science. We actually do this as a regular matter for all the communities in which we live.

We are committed to enabling all staff members to reach their full potential. Therefore, we are committed to providing accessibility. When employees need help with accessibility to do their jobs, we do whatever we can to help. This goes beyond just providing a special chair or a large computer screen. Accessibility by PSI is sometimes provided by time. Time to deal with intrusions of life, recognizing this can be significantly constrained in some businesses. Accessibility promotes productivity and a positive work environment.

Always striving to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility enhances our ability to advance our mission objectives and promotes the betterment of our science. Denouncing these principles and degrading their use is harmful to our science and to American competitiveness in the world. It worries me that such rhetoric has often presaged violence against those who are perceived to benefit from the denounced activity. Many of our scientists are concerned for their future and even physical safety. There are legitimate complaints regarding some activities undertaken under the rubric of these principles. However, I would like to see those specific objections considered and addressed in a fashion that is narrowly tailored to relieve any wrong being committed while maintaining and building on all the good we have achieved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark V. Sykes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark V. Sykes, Ph.D., J.D.
CEO and Director
Planetary Science Institute