Science Instruments for Conducting Solar System Exploration

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): ARC

This subtopic supports the development of advanced instruments and instrument technology to enable or enhance scientific investigations on future planetary missions. New measurement concepts, advances in existing instrument concepts, and advances in critical components are all of interest. Proposers are strongly encouraged to relate their proposed technology development to future planetary exploration goals.

Instruments for both remote sensing and in situ investigations are required for NASA's planned and potential solar system exploration missions. Instruments are required for the characterization of the atmosphere, surface and subsurface regions of planets, satellites, and small bodies. These instruments may be deployed for remote sensing, on orbital or flyby spacecraft, or for in situ measurements, on surface landers and rovers, subsurface penetrators, and airborne platforms. In situ instruments cover spatial scales from surface reconnaissance to microscopic investigations. These instruments must be capable of withstanding operation in space and planetary environmental extremes, which include temperature, pressure, radiation, and impact stresses.

Examples of instruments that will meet the goals include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Instrumentation for definitive chemical, mineralogy, and isotopic analysis of surface materials: soils, dusts, rocks, liquids, and ices at all spatial scales, from planetary mapping to microscopic investigation. Examples include advanced techniques in reflectance spectroscopy, wet chemistry, laser-induced breakdown spectrometers, water and ice detectors, novel gas chromatograph and mass spectrometry, and age-dating systems.

- Instrumentation for the assessment of surface terrain and features. Examples include lidar systems and advanced imaging systems.

- Geophysical sensing systems to determine the near-surface and subsurface structure, textures, bulk components, and composition, such as seismic sensors, porosity measurement devices, permeameters, and surface penetrating radars.

- Instruments and components that will rely on, and take advantage of, high power capabilities, up to 100
kW, for measurements of planetary surfaces. The instruments may make direct or indirect use of the power, long duration observations, or extremely high data rates.

- Instrumentation focused on assessments of the identification and characterization of biomarkers of extinct or extant life, such as prebiotic molecules, complex organic molecules, biomolecules, or biominerals.

- Instrumentation for the chemical and isotopic analysis of planetary atmospheres.

- Advanced detectors for solar absorption spectrometry. One example is a detector that is fast and linear, i.e., does not saturate under high photon fluxes.

- Environmental sensing systems, such as meteorological sensors, humidity sensors, wind and particle size distribution sensors, and sounders for atmospheric profiling.

- Particles and fields measurements, such as magnetometers, and electric field monitors.

- Enabling instrument component and support technologies, such as laser sources, miniaturized pumps, sample inlet systems, valves, integrated bulk sample handling and processing systems, and fluidic technologies for sample preparation.

Research should be conducted to demonstrate technical feasibility during Phase I and show a path toward a Phase II hardware and software demonstration, and when possible, deliver a demonstration unit or software package for JPL testing at the completion of the Phase II contract.