HQ Update
Summarizing the major changes that have occurred over the past few years: All state consortia are now funded at the same level, regardless of state population or STEM research investment level. Our base funding, the core of our program is now at $860,000 with an open augmentation that will bring eligible jurisdictions to $910,000. Congress has typically appropriated funds in excess of the base amount for state SGC’s. NASA’s OSTEM has elected to retain some of these funds to offer competitive grants for which only state SGC’s are eligible. We typically share these opportunities with the Affiliate network, but do not have the capacity at the present time to vie for them. If you see a funding opportunity that you’re interested in, do reach out and we can discuss.

The likelihood of further increases in base funding for NASA’s flagship STEM program is forcing some difficult questions about Cost-Share. As our base funding increases, the cost-share requirement must also increase per the language in the NASA Authorization Bill. This creates some inequities as organizations without deep pockets and/or sophisticated grants offices increasingly do not have the ability to meet and document the match requirement. In our advocacy with Congress over the past few years, we have been making the case for updated authorization language that reduces the burden on states while maintaining the essential selling point of a program that leverages federal dollars with other investments to increase the impact of STEM programming and workforce development in the states.

As funding levels increase, we are facing additional requirements to demonstrate the effectiveness of the federal investment. The three most important changes to our operations (true for all SGCs) are

(1) Spending Thresholds. We are now required to meet spending thresholds before additional allocated funds are released. NASA now requests monthly draw-downs. A draw-down is the process of certifying that funds have been expended against the grant and requesting those funds from the government. This is the mechanism by which our progress toward spending thresholds is evaluated. And it is why we request that your institution invoice us for grant expenditures on a timely basis. We cannot draw-down until you have invoiced us and we have paid you.

(2) Site Visits. Ours is July 20, 2023. We discussed these at our last meeting. Our team is currently preparing the extensive documentation on our coming site visit. If you have a program or project at your institution that you’d like to see highlighted during the site visit, please reach out!

(3) External Evaluation. Starting in the next funding cycle, all SGCs will be required to fund an external evaluator to make regular assessments of program execution and outcomes. We have an Evaluator identified and when the requirement is in place, we will be introducing that person to the AC.

Finally, the National Space Grant meeting will be held in Hawaii this year at the Alohilani Resort (Waikiki Beach). The dates are 9/27-9/29/2023. If you would like to attend, reach out to our office for additional details.

Program Highlights
We just completed the fourth annual Aerospace Jam event. The event, operated by Mike Mortensen (Carroll University) and hosted by the Milwaukee Bucks, attracts teams of high school students competing in a “lunar lander” challenge involving small drones navigating a course and using student programmed sensor packages to do science observations on a simulated lunar landscape. The event was a great success and we’re grateful for the support of the Bucks and the leadership of Carroll on this program.

We are starting to see strong application numbers for many of our programs, hopefully signaling a return to pre-pandemic levels of engagement. Related to the spending threshold discussion above, we were able to fund more programs this year as we attempt to spend down unallocated or returned funds from previous years and meet our spend threshold for the current grant year ending in June of 2023. Christine will have more details in her report.
First Nations Launch: The 2023 FNL program will be held April 28-30 at Carthage College and Bong Recreational Area. Event details will be shared over the usual channels within the next several days. Again, this year, FNL and CRL launches will take place on the same weekend. Christine and Rob will have the full update on launch weekend, including a substantial presence of VIP visitors.

Office Updates:
A new face! Rob Cannon joins the WSGC team as Program Manager for the First Nations Launch program. You will have the chance to meet him at the spring AC meeting. And meet him in person at the upcoming FNL event.
Welcome, Rob!

Website – we were recently required to migrate the WSGC website spacegrant.carthage.edu to a new server home and to upgrade the underlying architecture. The migration was, as these things are, fraught. If you noticed missing pages or broken links, please bring them to our attention. We are still finding and resolving issues lo these many months after the upgrade.

Kevin