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Lessons From the U.S. Meteorological Public-Private Sector Services Partnership

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The 2003 National Research Council (NRC) report, *The Sun to the Earth—and Beyond*, identifies broad scientific challenges in the solar and space physics field. The report acknowledges the challenge of the public-private sector partnership in applications and offers a recommendation that "clear policies should be developed that describe government and industry roles, rights, and responsibilities in space weather activities."

The NRC also published a report titled *Fair Weather: Effective Partnerships in Weather and Climate Services* in 2003, which describes the basics of the public-private partnership for weather and climate information and services. While the space weather public-private partnership—and science—is decades behind the meteorological one, lessons from the meteorological community can be valuable as the space weather enterprise grows and evolves. For example, much controversy stems from the 1991 National Weather Service (NWS) policy that states, "the NWS will not compete with the private sector when a service is currently provided or can be provided by commercial enterprises, unless otherwise directed by applicable law." The *Fair Weather* report recommends that "the NWS should replace its 1991 public-private partnership policy with a policy that defines processes for making decisions on products, technologies, and services, rather than rigidly defining the roles of the NWS and the private sector." The U.S. meteorological community has long debated this NWS policy; therefore the space weather community should proceed with caution in developing policies describing partnerships.

The *Fair Weather* report's primary conclusion was that "it is counterproductive and diversionary to establish detailed and rigid boundaries for each sector outlining who can do what and with which tools. Instead, efforts should focus on improving the processes by which the public and private providers of weather services interact." This same recommendation is appropriate for the space weather community.

Together, the NOAA Space Environment Center (SEC) and private sector vendors need to develop mechanisms for communicating their future development needs and for defining their evolving partnership. While the SEC does hold an annual vendors meeting and continues to foster relationships within the space weather industry, there are additional steps it can take. For example, the SEC should consider the input of the private sector vendors before considering requests for new services. In addition, SEC officials could enhance communication by encouraging vendors to attend the annual Space Weather Week conference and allow time for them to express their voice to the wider community. SEC should also encourage NOAA leadership to provide more funding for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program at the SEC and to develop and fund a more flexible and focused grants program for vendors as an incentive to develop specific space weather services.

There are also specific actions that private sector vendors can take. They should join the SEC in expressing a common voice for improving the data flow and the research-to-operations process in the government. Vendors can also take steps to publish their work and communicate with researchers. Moreover, the private sector should seek to become participants in funding agency proposal reviews. Overall, the partnership should involve a process for making decisions on future products and services, involving discussions with academia and the international community. The space weather services partnership will succeed if all the sectors maintain an ongoing dialogue and appreciate the value of each group.

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