

COMMUNICATING WITH ETI: FIVE NEEDED STEPS

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The preliminary goals for the position paper on communications to extraterrestrial civilizations have been successfully achieved. Now it is time to consider what major steps are needed next. Five steps are proposed in this paper.

1. Presenting the draft declaration to the UNCOPUOS was a remarkable achievement. But now it is time to abandon the goal of a legally binding document approved by the United Nations and then incorporated into the laws of various nations. Instead, aim for discussion and widespread agreement from the most relevant scientific organizations.
2. Seek widespread agreement that this draft Declaration applies only to replies to artificial radio or optical signals from many light-years distant. The Declaration is not intended to apply to several other distinct situations in which someone attempts to communicate to ETI, although some of its particular principles do apply.
3. Produce one or more widely acceptable draft replies in hopes that they will influence any actual reply. Or at least move toward widespread agreement on the desirable component parts of a reply, its tone, and perhaps the technical details of transmission.
4. Make any other needed preparations for contact. Such arrangements include communications, security, dealing with authorities and the media, and protecting the incoming data. In order to improve these various arrangements, study how authorities and the general public will likely react to contact.
5. Launch a major effort to understand (as best we can) an intelligence that is thousands of years older than humanity, that is deeply alien, that has developed near-miraculous technological capacities, and that has evolved in values and ethics over many millennia. What sorts of goals and missions might a highly advanced ETI be pursuing? Why might it want contact with humanity? What are the major implications for our search and communication strategies—and for our preparations for contact?