

Science Mission Directorate Policy

Policy and Requirements for SMD Communications for Flight Missions

SMD Policy Document SPD-26, Revision A

Recommended by SMD Science Management Council,
Approved by SMD Associate Administrator

Responsible SMD Official: Director, Science Engagement & Partnerships
Responsible Office of Communications Official: SMD Senior Public Affairs Officer

1. Overview

This policy defines roles and responsibilities for all public communication activities related to NASA Science Mission Directorate's flight missions, including both strategic and competitively-selected missions. NASA defines communications as a comprehensive set of activities to effectively convey, and provide an understanding and inspiration about NASA's work, its objectives and benefits to target audiences, the public and other stakeholders, including NASA employees. These efforts are intended to promote interest and foster participation in NASA's endeavors and to develop exposure to – and appreciations for– Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). This diverse, broad, and integrated set of activities includes media products and services, multimedia products and services (including Web, social media and non-technical publications), and public engagement (outreach) activities and events.

Public communications that reference “NASA”, “Science Mission Directorate”, the name of the mission, the activities of the mission, or specific mission roles (mission project manager, principal investigator, etc.) are considered to be mission-related and are covered by this policy. The intent is to leverage SMD and Agency resources using a coordinated approach consistent with new media and campaign processes and strategies.

This policy does not cover technical communications directed primarily at the scientific and technical community including scientific papers, technical reports, and web sites serving mission data and other technical information. Additionally, this policy does not cover reimbursable missions.

2. Requirements

NASA's communications activities are governed by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 1213 – Release of Information to News and Information Media. (NOTE: The CFR language includes old verbiage. Therefore, “Public Affairs” should be assumed as synonymous with “Communications” and “Assistant Administrator for Public Affairs” synonymous with “Associate Administrator for Communications”.) The following language from 1213.103 is specifically related to this policy:

“(j) All NASA-funded missions will have a public affairs plan, approved by the Assistant Administrator for Public Affairs, which will be managed by Headquarters and/or a designated NASA center.

(k) Public affairs activities for NASA-funded missions will not be managed by non-NASA institutions, unless authorized by the Assistant Administrator for Public Affairs.”

The scope of NASA’s communications programs and how they are reviewed, approved, and managed are governed by NASA documents NPD and NPR 7120.5E, NPD 1380, and NPD 1388.1, and the SMD Management Handbook. This Science Policy Document supplements these documents to provide SMD-specific policies and requirements.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

NASA Center, including Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)

Each flight mission manages the communications plan and activities utilizing the communications office of a NASA Center or JPL. Missions managed by a NASA center or JPL will request support of that center’s communications office. For missions not managed by a NASA Center or JPL, the center where the Program Office resides will fulfill the communications support role.

The communications offices will be responsible for coordinating and executing mission communications activities – along with the mission’s Principal Investigator (PI) and Project Office for PI-led missions, and Program Office for strategic missions– and with the approval of Headquarters SMD and Office of Communications.

Principal Investigators

For PI-led missions, the PI fills a challenging, multidisciplinary role which demands excellent communication, team building, and management skills. The PI is a key spokesperson for the mission –along with NASA officials- and is integral in communicating mission updates, science, and new discoveries.

The PI provides content, analysis, and context for communication campaigns and news stories. In keeping with NASA’s communications goals, content should convey an understanding of the mission and its objectives, and the benefits to target audiences, the public, and other stakeholders.

As part of NASA’s review and approval process, the PI, or his or her designee, shall 1) coordinate, 2) review, and 3) approve, with the designated NASA Center communications office, all mission-related communications activities. In case of incompatible views, NASA will have final decision on release of public products, while ensuring that scientific and technical information remains accurate and unfiltered.

NASA Headquarters

NASA Headquarters and the Program Office personnel provide the necessary oversight and funding for communications in accordance with NASA and SMD policies for both PI-led and strategic missions.

4. Funding Requirements

Mission-related communications are funded from the project budget directly through the NASA Center or Program Office. However, for PI missions, the communications budget may or may not be within the PI's mission cost cap. Funding for communications activities prior to mission confirmation shall be approved by the SMD Division Director.

5. Development and Approval of Mission Communication Plans

The assigned Center's communications office will develop the mission communications plans in cooperation with the project and PI, in accordance with the following guidance.

- The communications plan shall be developed during Phase B of the mission. The plan shall include topline messaging, target audiences, and media processes linked to reaching target audiences and associated detailed budgets, milestones, metrics and timelines, and reporting requirements.
- The approved communications plan is a required product for KDP-C. Approval is provided by the SMD Science Division Director, the Associate Administrator for the Office of Communications or the SMD Senior Public Affairs Officer, and the SMD Director, Science Engagement & Partnerships.
- A communications plan for extended missions shall be updated if needed following the Division's Senior Review. The approval process is the same as outlined above for the prime missions.

Approved:

Thomas Zurbuchen
Associate Administrator
For Science Mission Directorate

Date