THE PLANETARY SOCIETY

Protecting NASA Science & U.S. Leadership in FY 2026

Prepared by Casey Dreier and Jack R. Kiraly of The Planetary Society
casey.dreier@planetary.org and jack.kiraly@planetary.org

- **NASA is the anchor customer for the private space industry**
  NASA leverages commercial companies to provide communications, integration, and other logistical services that support the agency's ambitious plans for space exploration. The U.S. taxpayer reaps the benefits: Independent analyses calculate the return on investment for NASA at 3-to-1, generating more than $75 billion in economic value per year and supporting more than 300,000 jobs across all 50 states.

- **...and the innovator of the technologies of tomorrow**
  The United States pioneered the fields of Earth and space sciences because of strategic investments in scientific and technological breakthroughs in the 1950s and '60s. NASA continues that tradition today—transforming our understanding of the universe, developing sophisticated instruments that become everyday technologies, and inspiring future generations of explorers.

- **Science funding is an investment in the nation's success**
  Adjusting for inflation, NASA Science was funded at nearly $9 billion in FY 2020. Restoring funding to a pre-pandemic level ensures NASA can pursue breakthrough science missions, fully leverage emerging commercial capabilities, bolster the highly skilled space workforce, and maintain American prominence in space exploration.

- **U.S. leadership in science is facing an uncertain financial future**
  NASA's science program is under immense fiscal pressure, having already lost over $1 billion in real buying power since 2020. Recent reports state that the agency may face as much as a 50% cut to its science programs and large reductions in its workforce. Any significant cuts to science would cancel or delay critical missions, impair national leadership in science and technology, and weaken America's strategic capabilities and standing abroad.

Congress has the opportunity to restore NASA Science funding to the level achieved during the first Trump Administration: $9 billion in FY 2026

The Planetary Society requests $9 billion for NASA SMD in FY 2026

- This investment would counteract inflation, **enable a balanced and ambitious exploration science program**, and provide certainty for commercial and international partners.
- **Continued support for NASA's SMD preserves this unique asset of the United States.** Exploratory science inspires future generations, engages the nation's STEM workforce and talent pipeline, and ensures continued U.S. leadership in space science and exploration.
- Reports of a proposed 50% cut to NASA SMD represent an extinction-level event for the U.S.-led science community **that would surrender U.S. leadership in space science and exploration to its global competitors.**

Unique Missions Funded and Operated by NASA SMD

Current Missions	Future Missions
New Horizons Mission to Pluto Exploring ancient mysteries in deep space	**Dragonfly Mission to Titan** A nuclear-powered octocopter
Curiosity and Perseverance Rovers Traversing the martian surface for signs of past life	**Mars Sample Return** Foundational step toward crewed missions
James Webb Space Telescope Revolutionizing astronomy daily	**Habitable Worlds Observatory** Directly imaging exoplanets to search for life
Europa Clipper Flying to study Jupiter's icy moon	**NEO Surveyor** Dedicated asteroid hunter
OSIRIS-APEX Rock sampler-turned-asteroid interceptor	**VERITAS Orbiter & DAVINCI Probe** The first U.S. missions to Venus in 30+ years
Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter 20 years and 80,000+ orbits looking for water	**7 More Commercial Lunar Landers** Building a new cis-lunar industry

...and more than 120 other missions to understand our place in the universe!

About The Planetary Society

With a global community of more than 2 million space enthusiasts, The Planetary Society is the world's largest and most influential independent space advocacy organization. Co-founded in 1980 by Carl Sagan and now led by CEO Bill Nye, we empower the public to play a meaningful role in space exploration to explore worlds, find life off Earth, and protect our planet from dangerous asteroids. We are powed by our members. Anyone on or off Earth can join.

Learn more about The Planetary Society's Space Policy & Advocacy program, including recent analysis and regularly updated datasets, at planetary.org/space-policy.