



Public-Private Partnerships

SGAC Task Force on U.S. Space Policy

Introduction

Public-private partnerships between NASA and commercial entities have expanded significantly over the past 40 years. Initially, NASA projects limited industry's involvement to cost-plus contracting, but the private sector's role has increased significantly as NASA increasingly embraces fixed-price services procurement. Commercial companies will likely play an increasingly vital role in U.S. space activities as NASA continues embracing public-private partnerships to execute its space priorities.

Evolution of NASA public-private partnerships

Since its establishment in 1958, NASA has contracted private companies to support its space priorities. For example, NASA contracted Boeing to design the first stage of the Saturn V rocket that launched Apollo astronauts to the Moon. Over time, however, as commercial innovation accelerated and commercial prices decreased, NASA has expanded public-private partnerships from cost-plus contracting - where NASA contracts companies to deliver products that NASA then owns and operates - to fixed-price services where NASA contracts companies to provide space services without NASA ownership or even operation. For example, companies contracted under NASA's NextSTEP-2 program to develop a Human Landing System for the Moon are not only responsible for designing a spacecraft that conforms with NASA's mission requirements, but for owning and operating the spacecraft to execute the mission. NASA's Commercial LEO Development program goes even further by directly subsidizing industry efforts to develop commercially-owned and -operated space stations offering low-Earth orbit services to the U.S. government.

Congressional support for NASA partnerships

Congressional authorization and appropriation legislation over the last few decades supported by executive directives such as the National Space Policy have consistently supported and, at times, driven NASA's use of public-private partnerships to stimulate domestic industry and deliver successful NASA missions. NASA has also used a wide range of Congressionally-authorized federal procurement vehicles - such as Broad Agency Announcements and Small Business Innovation Research grants - to facilitate further partnerships.

Conclusion

NASA has increasingly embraced public-private partnerships as effective and financially sustainable vehicles for space missions. NASA sees the potential of future collaboration to drive industry growth, improve mission success, and foster new exploration pathways.

This document was prepared by the SGAC Task Force on U.S. Space Policy.

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