

National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
Office of the Administrator  
Washington, DC 20546-0001



October 26, 2015

TO: Officials-in-Charge of Headquarters Offices  
Directors, NASA Centers

FROM: Associate Administrator

SUBJECT: Independent Assessment of NASA Programs and Projects

Over the past two years as the NASA Associate Administrator, I have sponsored various assessments of the Agency's core capabilities in technical, business services, and programmatic areas. Each evaluation of these capabilities has resulted in recommendations toward Agency-wide solutions yielding efficiencies. In particular, a look at the Programmatic Capability — consisting of program management, resource analysis, scheduling, cost estimation, and independent assessment activities — has pointed to how our workforce is deployed to meet programmatic needs. For moving toward a more efficient operating model in the programmatic area, my intent is to clarify Mission and Center accountability for independent assessment.

Based on this overall look at the programmatic capability, I have decided to align the Agency's independent assessment function toward ensuring mission success as well as enhancing management accountability. Rather than viewing independent assessment as a separate organization, in the form of the Office of Evaluation, the executing Mission Directorates and Center Directors will *own the accountability* of establishing independent assessment of their programs and projects.

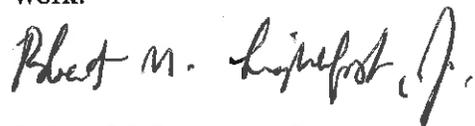
To be clear, independent assessment of NASA Programs and Projects will continue. Mission Directorates in coordination with executing Centers will be responsible for selecting the Standing Review Board (SRB) chair and recruiting the Agency's expertise to populate the board and providing that to the Decision Authority, the NASA Associate Administrator. The Office of the Chief Engineer will assist in tapping the technical subject-matter experts, while the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) will assist in enabling programmatic expertise. The intent of this approach is to use and leverage the talent across the Agency (Center to Center; program to program) to assess our missions, thus allowing NASA to share best practices across project experiences through the independent assessment function. Currently, the Science Mission Directorate implements a similar approach for classes of missions not requiring the NASA Associate Administrator as the decision authority.

From an organizational perspective, this decision means dissolving the Independent Program Assessment Office (IPAO), as well as the umbrella organization, the Office of Evaluation. An IPAO transition plan is in development, with focused efforts around workforce reassignments and ongoing independent assessments. The intent is for the IPAO staff to be deployed to their Centers to solve in-line gaps in programmatic analysis skills. The other functioning office, the Cost Analysis Division (CAD) will transition to the OCFO, where the CAD skills and tools will enhance current efforts in strategic program analysis and integration. This overall transition and redeployment is targeted for completion by the end of calendar year 2015.

This approach will maintain review independence ensuring those NASA experts supporting a review are coming from a different chain of command, selected with no conflict of interest, and being funded through separate sources. This model will provide increased accountability in independent assessment, as the Mission Directorates are motivated toward mission success and performance. The responsible organization knows best which program areas prove most challenging and where a second opinion and further analysis are warranted.

Note that the realization of this independent assessment alignment depends on trust among the NASA leadership and a shared perspective on accountability. With that trust comes communication in established forums, such as the Agency Program Management Council, where, as the Associate Administrator, I regularly check the performance of programs/projects, as well as chair Key Decision Point (KDP) project life-cycle reviews. The products from these KDP decision meetings, informed by independent assessment, will continue to be a critical part of those assessments. On a day-to-day basis, the governance model also provides three separate paths (Program, Engineering, and Safety) for dissenting opinions to be elevated and dispositioned, thus providing another opportunity for identifying any breaks in our program and project assessment process.

Again, let me emphasize this approach is *not* about eliminating independent assessment of programs and projects; that function remains vital to NASA's long-term success. Rather, it's about the clarifying accountability of the Mission Directorates and the performing Centers and about enabling more of our skilled workforce toward in-line program/project work.



Robert M. Lightfoot, Jr.