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

FROM: Deputy Administrator and Chief Acquisition Officer

SUBJECT: NASA Chief Acquisition Officer’s Intent

Since the issuance of my first Chief Acquisition Officer’s (CAO) Intent memorandum in December 2022, NASA’s missions have continued to soar and inspire. The James Webb Telescope has continued to re-define our understanding of the cosmos during its first year of operations. In the fall of 2023, “Asteroid Autumn” saw the OSIRIS-Rex mission return the first-ever sample from an asteroid, Bennu; as well as the launch of the Psyche mission to study a metal-rich asteroid between Mars and Jupiter. As part of the Psyche mission, we also demonstrated a Deep Space Optical Communications capability, sending a high-definition streaming video from nearly 19 million miles away from Earth. At the end of 2023, we celebrated 25 years of International Space Station Operations, and in January 2024, NASA and our partner revealed the X-59 quiet supersonic aircraft that will see first flight later this year. One month later, the Science Mission Directorate’s Commercial Lunar Payload Services Program enabled the first commercial landing on the Moon, delivering science and technology payloads in support of the Artemis program. As an Agency, we are embarking on the NASA 2040 transformation initiative to posture the Agency for preeminence in the future.

During this period, I have also reflected on the acquisition opportunities and challenges we face in delivering these and other ambitious missions. The recognition that the formulation of the Mars Sample Return program and the development of the On-orbit Servicing, Assembly, and Manufacturing 1 program have budget and schedule problems highlight those challenges, and in both cases, we have taken major steps to address them. We recognize opportunities and challenges are not exclusive to our development projects, but to our technical and mission service acquisitions as well; the new Agency Business Solution acquisition will impact the entire Agency and our focus is not only on major acquisitions with traditional aerospace or large aerospace companies, but also with our small business partners. With budget caps in place for fiscal year (FY) 2024 and FY 2025, it is all the more important that we steward our resources well to get the most mission success from the resources we have been entrusted with.
The purpose of this memo is to communicate the Agency’s progress in strengthening NASA acquisition\(^1\), and lay out my key acquisition priorities for the Agency to enable mission delivery. How we plan, oversee, and make decisions across the span of the acquisition life cycle is important – the more intentionally and carefully we do so, in the planning stage especially, will allow us to “slow down to speed up” later in the life cycle.

To strengthen our acquisition efforts and outcomes, under my authority as the CAO,\(^2\) I charge the Associate Administrator, NASA Officials-in-Charge, and leaders to ensure resource and workforce alignment with the following priorities:

**Continued Acquisition Innovation and Rigor:** To further acquisition innovation and rigor in support of NASA mission delivery, the Office of Procurement (OP) established an Enterprise Service and Analysis Division (ESAD), consisting of three offices, to advise and support the Agency:

- The NASA Acquisition Innovation Launchpad (NAIL) promotes procurement innovation through a design thinking framework, encouraging stakeholders to develop and implement creative procurement solutions.
- The E-Business System Office (EBSO) enhances Agency-wide capabilities in e-business systems and data-driven decision-making, providing real-time access to authoritative data through interactive dashboards.
- The Enterprise Pricing Office (EPO) serves as a center of excellence for pricing, streamlining contract closeout and cost/pricing policies across NASA, and offering innovative solutions to ensure fair prices throughout the enterprise.

**Improving the Quality and Utility of Acquisition Data.** Accurate and reliable acquisition data are strategic assets that are crucial for informed decision-making, guiding supplier selection, contract negotiations, and cost optimization. Fostering a culture of rigor and focusing on data quality will enable us to maximize the value of our data assets and make better informed acquisition decisions and Agency commitments. To that end, I would like to emphasize the importance of gathering reliable and consistent data on cost and schedule performance to better inform future acquisition activities.

**Increasing Access to NASA Grants.** OP recently began integrating grant funding opportunities into the NASA Acquisition Forecast. In doing so, NASA increased the amount of time grant-seeking entities have to prepare and submit grant applications and removed a known barrier for underserved communities’ participation in NASA grants. In FY 2023, ten of the Agency’s largest funding opportunities were added to the forecast, representing over $750 million in research funding.

To further strengthen our grants management and facilitate public access to this information, we will prioritize the following Federal-wide initiatives directed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to improve the consistency, accessibility, and ease with which grant-seeking

\(^1\) Consistent with [NASA Policy Directive 1000.5C](https://www.nasa.gov/ sites/default/files/ organise/5/1/0/0/Policy_for_NASA_Acquisition.pdf), Policy for NASA Acquisition.  
\(^2\) The role of the Chief Acquisition Officer is outlined in 41 U.S.C., Section 1702(b).
entities work with NASA and other Federal agencies:

- **Implementing the Update to Uniform Guidance.** On April 4, 2024, OMB released a memo, “Reducing Burden in the Administration of Federal Financial Assistance,” with significant revisions to the Uniform Grants Guidance, Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which sets rules for how trillions of dollars are spent by organizations across the country that receive Federal grants. To ensure that NASA and our recipients remain compliant with OMB’s requirements, OP is assessing the impact to NASA policies and administration operations. OP will work in concert with the Mission Directorates, Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM), and the Office of General Counsel (OGC) to implement by October 1, 2024.

- **Simplifying Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).** Federal agencies utilize NOFOs to solicit grant proposals from the public. OMB has tasked agencies with designing and executing a plan to increase the accessibility, readability, clarity, and design of their NOFOs starting in FY 2025. OP will develop guidelines for NASA NOFO simplification with inputs from grant-funding Mission Directorates and programs.

I charge our Mission Directorate Associate Administrators, Center Directors, and other Officials-in-Charge and senior leaders to encourage their grants management workforces to familiarize themselves with these important policy changes and engage with OP in a timely manner as they seek your input.

**Risk Management:** In July 2023, I directed the formation of an internal Risk Management Tiger Team to strengthen the Agency’s risk management framework. Specifically, the Tiger Team focused on identifying opportunities to support Mission Directorates, Centers, and program and project managers in managing and communicating their risks effectively.

Based on the findings of the Tiger Team, the Agency implemented several initiatives to improve risk management, including: 1) establishing the Agency Risk Management Officer (ARMO) to fortify our institutional program and project risk management policies, practices, and development; 2) strengthening the sequence and discipline of pre-formulation milestones for programs and Category I and select Category II projects, which represent the highest risk projects in our portfolio; and 3) strengthening the Acquisition Strategy Meeting (ASM) risk conversation by augmenting templates with Mission Concept Review (MCR) findings and identified risks; and 4) establishing an independent evaluation of the MCR cost and schedule estimates to enhance risk-informed decision-making at the ASM through the utilization of a small independent group.

Building on these efforts, our risk management efforts will prioritize the following:

- **Strengthening Objectives-Driven Risk Management and Risk Leadership.** The ARMO will work in concert with Mission Directorates, Centers, and Offices to increase awareness, understanding, and consideration of risks to their key objectives to support risk-informed decision-making in all phases of the acquisition life cycle. This collaboration includes the application of risk leadership principles to define and communicate the risk postures that
express the amount of risk NASA is willing to accept to achieve its acquisition objectives. Initiatives consist of an emphasis on risk-informed commitments made at Key Decision Points and a focus on the risk management community of practice.

- **Strengthening Risk Oversight of our Acquisitions.** Under the guidance of the Associate Administrator, the Assistant Administrator for Procurement/Deputy CAO, Chief Program Management Officer (CPMO), and ARMO will work in concert with the Office of the Executive Secretariat to strengthen our existing governance councils and policies. This includes setting clear expectations for acquisition strategy meetings that risk-informed data and evidence be utilized to support recommendations. Decisional outcomes will continue to be rigorously documented and tracked, aligning objectives and associated risk postures prior to execution of acquisition activity and development of the procurement strategy.

To that end, I charge our Associate Administrator, Mission Directorate Associate Administrators, Center Directors, and other Officials-in-Charge and senior leaders to: 1) promote a culture that fosters and values Risk Leadership; and 2) encourage objectives-driven risk management activities that enable productive discussions through open multidisciplinary discussions of concerns, risks, and issues with the potential to impact NASA’s success.

**Small Business:** Small businesses, including socioeconomic businesses—i.e., Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB), Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB), Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB), and Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUBZone)—are essential to NASA, contributing innovative and cost-effective solutions to our missions while benefiting the economy. While NASA has consistently met our small business prime contracting goal and has an “A” grade from the Small Business Administration for the past seven years, NASA has not achieved our small business socio-economic goals. In addition, recent Congressional and OMB policy changes have significantly raised the Government-wide small business socio-economic program goals for SDVOSB to five percent and SDB to 13 percent for FY 2024, and 15 percent for FY 2025.

In February 2023, I directed OP and the Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP) to co-lead an intra-agency SDB Strategy Tiger Team to conduct a thorough review of our existing practices, identify barriers, and assess processes to create a comprehensive strategy for meeting and surpassing our SDB goals. The team has recommended several actionable strategies to enhance contract awards to SDBs and boost overall awareness of opportunities at NASA for all small businesses (SB).

Key initiatives include establishing a set-aside for all construction requirements between $250,000 and $5 million and establishing an SB set-aside for physical security requirements that have been awarded under the 8(a) Business Development Program. The team also introduced a Small Business Training Program to educate our acquisition community about the benefits of SB socioeconomic programs. Additionally, NASA has implemented a Vendor Communication Plan that specifically targets providing information to Small Businesses/SDBs/WOSBs/SDVOSBs/HUBZones, ensuring they are well-informed and positioned to compete for contracts and grant opportunities. NASA’s [2023 Equity Action Plan](#) outlines efforts by OP and OSBP to enhance engagement with SBs and extend contracting and grant opportunities to underserved
communities. These collective efforts will increase contract and grant awards to all SBs including those belonging to underserved communities, thereby increasing NASA’s industrial base and allowing NASA to achieve its mission.

**Workforce and Culture:** NASA’s acquisition professionals are instrumental to making NASA’s mission a reality. In FY 2023, NASA employed about 4,500 certified acquisition professionals in procurement and contracting, program and project management, and project planning and control disciplines.³ We will continue to empower and support our acquisition workforce by fostering a culture of engagement, honest communication, knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary problem-solving and data-driven decision-making. We will continue to pursue the following approaches to advance the capability of the workforce charged with planning, overseeing, and executing NASA’s acquisitions:

- **Empowering the Project Management Workforce:** We will continue to foster communities of practice within the procurement, project management, and project planning and control (PP&C) disciplines. These communities of practice will develop and share best practices, lessons learned, data access, and tool implementation techniques. We will also invest in software and tools, including advanced analytical techniques and cloud services, so that practitioners from different parts of the Agency can easily access shared repositories of project information, handbooks and guidance documents, and data.

- **Encouraging a Culture of Engagement and Transparency:** As we steward increasingly complex projects and programs forward, we need to hear diverse perspectives to inform critical decisions. This becomes even more critical in a budget-constrained environment, where diverse views are needed to make the right investment decisions with limited Agency resources.

I continue to be impressed with the cross-pollination of best practices among and between our Mission Directorates and Centers, as well as between our discipline communities for procurement, PP&C, risk management, and project management. It has been gratifying to see these communities come together to share best practices on how to address our multidisciplinary acquisition challenges, such as hosting the Cost and Schedule Symposium alongside the Project Management Symposium.

Overall, NASA has developed a robust set of policies and best practices to ensure the greatest chance of successfully realizing our mission-strategic and technical goals within schedule and budget constraints. As leaders of NASA, I appreciate each of you engaging on this critically important subject and working with your teams to strengthen our acquisition activity. The strength and agility of NASA’s acquisition management and practices and the capability of our acquisition workforce are critical to enabling the success of NASA’s complex missions and meeting the myriad expectations of our stakeholders, partners, and the Nation.

³ This includes 833 professionals in 1102 Contracting Series, covering roles such as Contract Specialist, Contracting Officer, Contract Price/Cost Analyst, Procurement Analyst, and similar positions and other related job series to include 1101 General Business and Industry Series and the 1105 Purchasing Series. NASA also has nearly 3,500 Contracting Officer Representatives, over 500 supporting core PP&C competencies (civil servants and contractors) and approximately 150 Federal Acquisition Certifications in Program and Project Managers.
In addition, I invite employees to share ideas or feedback for acquisition improvement to myself, the Associate Administrator, and the Deputy Chief Acquisition Officer at hq-dl-cao-acq-improvements@mail.nasa.gov.

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