

8 June 2026

Members of the MEPAG community,

There have been deeply concerning developments in the NASA MEP budget and proposed federal R&A funding policy in the last several weeks that many of you may not be aware of and have arguably worse consequences than last year's budget threat. If there was ever a time to take action in support of the Mars Exploration Program and federally-funded scientific research, now is that time.

MEP status: The Mars Exploration Program has been directed to absorb and manage the Skyfall payload on the Space Reactor-1 (SR-1) demonstration mission within its budget. This will largely be under the Mars Future Missions line, effectively eliminating any new developments/missions until after SR-1/Skyfall launches. It is also anticipated that the costs for Skyfall will exceed the available funding in that line (\$110M), which means that without a budget augmentation in FY27, the chances are quite high that more than one currently operating mission at Mars will be terminated and their funds redirected to supporting Skyfall.

FY27 budget status: The President's budget request for NASA Science looked very much like last year's, and although members of Congress quickly indicated that request was "DOA", the House markup is flat (at the FY26 level), with the entire MEP at \$300M. This means that a substantial fraction of the MEP's budget will go to Skyfall. Although launch is slated for late 2028, there are legitimate questions as to whether that is feasible. If that slips to the 2031 opportunity, and the MEP budget is not augmented to cover the added costs of Skyfall over the next several years, the planned program (based on the Mars Future Plan) is unlikely to make substantial progress. The Senate markup has been delayed, so we have a short window of time to show our support for a budget that enables the MEP program of record to continue alongside Skyfall. That would include a new payload pipeline, the previously-planned activities for the Mars Future Missions line, and support for ongoing extended missions that are still returning excellent science data and helping to ensure we maintain a highly skilled scientific and engineering workforce.

We encourage you to reach out to your elected Representatives and Senators as well as the leaders of the Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee and full Senate Appropriations Committee ASAP, to ensure they have your input before the markup begins. You can find resources online (some below) that will make it easy to submit such letters to the right people. (Write as an individual voter/scientist rather than an employee of XYZ organization.)

Grant management policy changes: OMB has announced its intent to formalize substantive, universal (not by agency/department) changes to the management of federal assistance that undermine scientific research. These include, but are not limited to: 1) review of all grants by political appointees prior to issuance (for alignment with the President's policy priorities) with peer review being advisory only, 2) permission to terminate grants "for convenience" at any time (also largely related to alignment with administration priorities), 3) tight restrictions on availability and use of funds for publication and conference travel costs, 4) new international collaboration restrictions, 5) indirect cost (overhead) rates as a competitive factor, and many others. More comprehensive summaries and resources for action (including forms for submitting your comments) can be found at these sites and others:

<https://elizabethginexi.substack.com/p/summary-of-key-changes-in-ombs-proposed>

<https://elizabethginexi.substack.com/p/what-we-need-to-do-next-ombs-proposed>

<https://www.planetary.org/save-nasa-science>

<https://aas.org/posts/news/2026/06/omb-proposed-rule>

<https://fromtheprow.agu.org/a-rule-that-would-rewrite-the-terms-of-u-s-science/>

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We have until 13 July 2026 to provide input on the proposed OMB changes. Longer letters are more impactful because OMB must respond to all significant, unique comments. Please avoid unsupported (i.e., political) objections and instead offer concrete examples of the consequences associated with specific restrictions in the OMB proposal. (The above resources link to the OMB proposal and website where comments should be submitted).

Please reach out to either of us if you have questions or comments. (We do not yet have a dedicated e-mail address or website, but are making progress on both!)

Sincerely,

Briony Horgan, Chair
Vicky Hamilton, Past Chair