

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND RESPONSES FROM NASA’S REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FOR EXECUTIVE ORDER 13985, ADVANCING EQUITY AND SUPPORT FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Background: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) issued a [Request for Information \(RFI\)](#) on June 15, 2021 soliciting insight from the public on whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups, in accordance with Section 2(b) of [Executive Order \(EO\) 13985 “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government”](#) (EO 13985). NASA also issued an announcement on June 28, 2021 via the Federal Register, which extended the comment response date of the RFI to August 31, 2021 and announced NASA’s public meeting that was held on July 13, 2021 from 1:00pm to 3:30pm.

The purpose of the public meeting was to discuss the questions detailed in the RFI and to obtain input from the public on the questions in the RFI. As stated in the RFI, the public input received may be used to assist NASA in advancing equity and removing barriers for members of the underserved communities as required by the EO 13985. NASA may also use the public's feedback to consider reduction of administrative burdens more broadly.

Executive Summary of Comments: NASA received 195 comments in response to the RFI. The comments received were from individual citizens, students, large and small businesses, colleges, and universities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions. The comments fall within the following categories.

	Category of Comments	#Comments
A	Criticism and discontentment regarding equality vs. equity and other similar negative race-based comments	57
B	Positive feedback and compliments of NASA’s programs	13
C	Recommendations for changes to various NASA programs	80
D	How to engage and help various underserved communities – such as the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alaskan Minority • LGBTQ+ • Native American communities 	1 3 2
E	Suggestions for specific NASA offices to include the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of STEM Engagement • Grants Policy and Compliance 	11 5
F	Barriers faced when trying to do business with NASA	4
G	Advocacy for working with MSIs	5
H	Scientific proposals or inventions	8
I	A statement regarding the Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL)	1
J	Out of the scope for this RFI comment	3
K	Two blank comments	2
	Total Comments Received	195

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NASA has provided responses to each category of comments below.

Summary of Comments and Responses:

(A) Criticism and Discontentment Regarding Equality vs. Equity/Race Based Comments. Summary: Fifty-seven (57) commenters expressed: views on anti-affirmative action; arguments against the validity of critical race theory; and the difference between equity vs. equality. Commenters also encouraged NASA to base hiring on qualifications only and to focus on the Agency's mission. Other comments ranged from focusing on race as a negative topic for a government agency to blatant discriminatory remarks about NASA.

Response: Section 5 of [EO 13985](#) required NASA and all Executive Branch Agencies to conduct an Agency equity assessment and prepare reports reflecting the findings on the following:

- 1) potential barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face to enrollment in and access to benefits and services in Federal programs;
- 2) potential barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face in taking advantage of agency procurement and contracting opportunities;
- 3) whether new policies, regulations, or guidance documents may be necessary to advance equity in agency actions and programs; and
- 4) the operational status and level of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities.

To support this EO, NASA issued this RFI to learn from the public to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups and to initiate strategic plans, consider reforms.

(B) Positive Feedback and Compliments of NASA's Programs. Summary: Thirteen (13) commenters, including one repeat comment, commended NASA on this RFI, its efforts to build upon diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in their programs, and what NASA has already accomplished to diversify its programs.

Response: NASA has an important mission and continues to diversify its programs, grants and contracts even greater to align with EO 13985.

(C) Recommended Changes to Various NASA Programs. Summary: NASA issued this RFI, in support of Section 5 of EO 13985, to learn:

- 1) potential barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face to enrollment in and access to benefits and services in Federal programs;
- 2) potential barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face in taking advantage of agency procurement and contracting opportunities;

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- 3) whether new policies, regulations, or guidance documents may be necessary to advance equity in agency actions and programs; and
- 4) the operational status and level of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities.

NASA provided questions within each of the categories listed above. Eighty (80) commenters, including seven repeat comments, provided recommendations about NASA programs by either submitting responses to all or some of the questions within the RFI.

Response: The comments in this category provided responses to the specific questions in areas of interest for this Administration and NASA and is assisting NASA in learning the barriers that exist for underserved communities, how to engage underserved communities. The comments in this category also provided suggestions on policy changes that can positively affect underserved communities. The comments have been given to the various appropriate offices, i.e. Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM) and the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO), Grants Policy and Compliance Division (GPC), Science Mission Directorate (SMD), the Office of Procurement (OP), the Office of Small Business Programs (OSBP), and the Science Technology Mission Directorate (STMD), for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially effect change in the respective areas.

(D) How to Engage and Help Various Underserved Communities. Summary: Six (6) commenters gave suggestions on how NASA could engage various underserved communities such as small minority-owned businesses in Alaska (1), the LGBTQ+ Community (3), and Native American business (2). The small minority-owned business in Alaska, Pacific Rim Media, focusing on STEM, provided recommendations on programs engaging Alaskan companies. The comments regarding the LGBTQ+ community provided suggested programs for the LGBTQ+ community, including mentorship. Other comments expressed concern about giving special treatment to the LGBTQ+ community. Two commenters provided recommendations to increase the employment of and work with Native Americans; the commenters also provided methods on how to increase the employment and engagement the Native American community.

Response: NASA issued this RFI seeking insight from the public on whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups, in accordance with EO 13985. Section 2(b) of EO 13985 defines underserved communities as, "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life..." "such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons

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with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.” The comments in this category, from underserved community members, as defined in Section 2(b) of EO 13985, provides very useful feedback to NASA. The comments have been given to the appropriate offices, i.e. OSTEM and ODEO, for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially effect change.

(E) Suggestions for specific NASA Offices. Summary: Sixteen (16) commenters provided recommendations for two NASA Offices: OSTEM (11) Commenters and GPC (5 comments). Commenters provided feedback on the Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) and recommendations on how to improve and simplify the grants application process to remove barriers. Commenters provided suggestions on how OSTEM can include more underserved community members, including recommendations about minority student participation, adult learners, programs targeted for underserved communities, and partnership development.

Response: The comments in this category are assisting NASA in accomplishing its goal of seeking insight from the public and receiving information on engaging underserved communities. The comments have been given to the appropriate offices, i.e. OSTEM and GPC for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially implement program changes.

(F) Barriers Faced. Summary: Four (4) commenters, including two repeat comments, addressed the barriers faced, specifically by scientists with disabilities and entrants in the technology transfer arena when trying to do business with NASA.

Response: The comments in this category are assisting NASA in accomplishing its goal of seeking insight from the public and receiving information on the barriers and challenges facing underserved communities. The comments have been given to the appropriate offices i.e., ODEO, SMD and STMD, for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially remove barriers identified.

(G) Advocacy for MSIs. Summary: Five (5) commenters, from MSIs and other organizations, suggested that NASA collaborate with MSIs, create programs for MSI students and gave recommendations on what that collaboration could entail. The commenters provided recommendations and methods for working with MSIs, including HBCUs and HSIs. A few of the recommendations are to: provide a non-reimbursable Space Act Agreement (SAA) to provide an accepted vehicle for information exchange with MSIs; develop a program to include more students from the HBCUs; and develop a path for past participants to find employment in the technical industries and science agencies like NASA.

Response: The comments in this category are assisting NASA in accomplishing its goals of seeking insight from the public and receiving information that can be used to execute this Administration's policy to advance equity for all, including people of color

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and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. The comments have been given to the appropriate offices i.e., OSTEM, SMD and OSBP for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially effect change in the area of MSIs.

(H) Submission of Scientific Proposals/Inventions. Summary: Eight (8) commenters submitted proposals or comments detailing their scientific inventions and methodologies for specific projects.

Response: These comments are outside the scope of this RFI. NASA's RFI was used to solicit information and insight from the public on whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups, in accordance with EO 13985. This RFI was not a request for proposal (RFP) inventions and methodologies. To view NASA's solicitations in support of various projects and programs, visit [Federal Business Opportunities](#). Companies can also register with the [NASA Vendor Database](#), which will enable you to receive information regarding NASA contracting opportunities, along with other NASA specific information, directly to the email address you provide.

(I) NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL). Summary: One (1) commenter provided specific recommendations for JPL regarding transparency in demographic data, the ombudsman program and employee satisfaction.

Response: The comment has been given to the JPL and the appropriate offices, i.e. ODEO and the Ombuds Office for review, consideration, and appropriate use to potentially effect change.

(J) Out of the Scope Comments. Summary: Three (3) commenters expressed views outside of NASA's RFI request; the comments range from thoughts on the 2020 election being stolen, to aliens being on the moon, and issues regarding policies against women in other countries.

Response: These comments are outside of the scope of this RFI as these comments are not related to purpose of the RFI.