



Biography

Ms. Cynthia Simmons

Director, Space Reactors Division

NASA's Research and Technology Mission Directorate

Cynthia Simmons is the director for NASA's Space Reactors Division within the agency's Research and Technology Mission Directorate. In this position, Simmons leads the overall implementation and execution of NASA's space nuclear activities, including the power and propulsion capabilities that will propel America into the next generation of space exploration by proving technologies that will be essential for future human missions to Mars and beyond.

NASA's Space Reactors Division is responsible for the management and development of, the first nuclear-propelled spacecraft in human history to venture beyond Earth's orbit into deep space, and Lunar Reactor -1, the first fission nuclear reactor on the Moon. The division also supports common enabling technologies and leverages existing nuclear launch safety and facility resources across the space nuclear portfolio.

Prior to her current role, Simmons served as deputy director of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, guiding the direction and management of one of NASA's major field installations. In her role as deputy director, she was responsible for the oversight and execution of a more than \$3 billion mission portfolio and a workforce consisting of more than 6,500 employees, both civil servant and contractor, including the nation's largest concentration of scientists, engineers and technologists dedicated to Earth and space science.

As deputy director Simmons directed center resources in successful implementation of science missions such as Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, ocean Ecosystem (PACE), X-ray Imaging and Spectroscopy Mission (XRISM), DragonFly, and the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope. Simmons also led the center in successful execution of a record level of support for UAS operations and hypersonic missions to NASA, DoD, and commercial users at Wallops. From August 2025 to May 2026, she served as Goddard's acting center director leading a successful, strategic transformation of the center.

Simmons was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force after graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1982. Among her military accomplishments, she was awarded the Air Force Meritorious Service Medal by the Under Secretary of the Air Force as a junior Captain for developing a new, innovative operational concept that enabled faster and more efficient national defense threat assessments. After being honorably discharged, Simmons transitioned to industry working for Unisys Corp. and later Iridium, where she supported more than 80 satellite launches in one year. Among her achievements, she designed a new on-orbit assessment technique for a low-Earth orbit, multi-satellite,

Image Credit: NASA





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cross-linked constellation with 24/7 real-time downlinked data. In addition, Simmons served as an engineer for dozens of space missions for international customers as well as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

In 2010, she became a NASA civil servant engineer supporting missions including the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites (GOES) program, Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO), Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM), and the Sample Analysis at Mars (SAM) suite of instruments. Simmons also served as instrument project manager for several high-vis missions to include DESDynI, the Astro-H/Soft X-ray Spectrometer, and ICESat-II Advanced Topographic Laser Altimeter System (ATLAS), a \$500 million science instrument.

In 2016, Simmons was appointed into NASA's senior executive service where she served in various senior leadership positions within Goddard's Engineering & Technology Directorate, Flight Projects Directorate, and the Office of the Center Director. Throughout her NASA career, she has served as chair and subject matter expert on NASA Standing Review Boards, as well as Goddard Standing Review Teams for several NASA missions. She has also provided engineering support for more than 20 NASA, Department of Defense, and commercial space and science missions. Simmons also serves as NASA Principal for the U.S. Search and Rescue Consortium comprising NASA, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Air Force and NOAA.

Among her honors and awards, Simmons is a Women@NASA honoree (2014), Goddard Senior Fellow, and 2016 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals (Sammies) nominee for her contributions to the country. She has received several NASA awards and honors including the NASA Silver Achievement Medal, multiple NASA Exceptional Achievement Awards, the Robert H. Goddard Leadership Honor Award for her leadership of instrument projects, and the Presidential Rank Award (2022).

Simmons holds a Bachelor of Science from the U.S. Air Force Academy and Master of Engineering in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Maryland, College Park. She also held a certified NASA program/project manager at the senior expert level.