

Astrophysics Explorers Program 2026 Small Explorer Pre-Proposal Conference

Welcome

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It is an exciting time for NASA Astrophysics



APD Workforce Support and Development:

- The Astrophysics Division is aligned with the Agency priority of supporting early career scientists across the entire country, including by offering the following opportunities:
 - The Future Investigator in Earth and Space Science and Technology (FINESST)
 - NASA Hubble Fellowship Program (NHFP)
 - Roman Technology Fellows
 - Many R&A programs fund students

Research Opportunities in Space and Earth Science ROSES 2026:

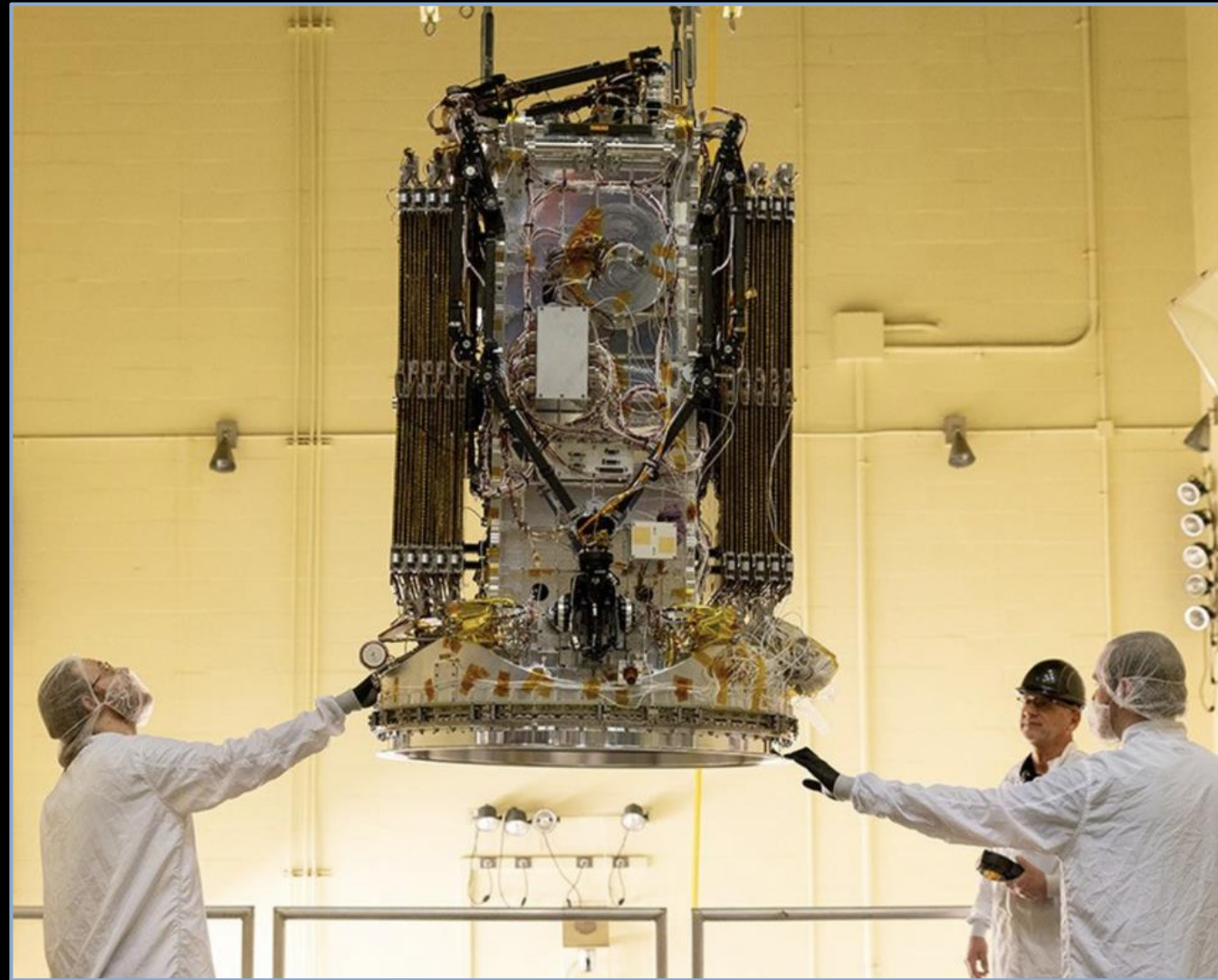
D.1	Astrophysics Research Program Overview			
D.2	Astrophysics Data Analysis	ADAP	DAPR	
D.3	Astrophysics Research in Technology	ART	DAPR	APRA+SAT-Cubesats-LA
D.4	Astrophysics Theory Program	ATP	DAPR	
D.5	AGIGO: Swift, Fermi, NuSTAR, TESS, NICER, IXPE, XRISM	AGIGO	DAPR	
D.6	Artificial Intelligence for Astrophysics Networks	AIAN	DAPR	
D.7	Laboratory Astrophysics	LabAstro	DAPR	
D.8	Nancy Grace Roman Technology Fellowships	RTF		By invitation only
D.9	LISA Preparatory Science	LPS	DAPR	2 year cadence
D.10	Habitable Worlds Observatory Precursor Science Investigations	HWO-PSI	DAPR	
D.11	US Contributions to Ariel Preparatory Science	USCAPS	DAPR	
D.12	Theoretical and Computational Astrophysics Networks	TCAN		Not solicited
D.13	Astrophysics Pioneers	Pioneers	DAPR	Cubesats added in
G.3	Exoplanets Research Program	XRP	DAPR	
G.5	Future Investigators in NASA Earth and Space Science and Techno	FINESST	DAPR	
G.9	Citizen Science Seed Funding Program	CSSFP	DAPR	
G.11	Interdisciplinary Consortia for Astrobiology Research	ICAR	DAPR	APD and PSD

Swift rapid-response capability is considered scientifically irreplaceable; boosting is an astrophysics priority

- Extends the life of NASA's premier time-domain and multi-messenger astrophysics observatory.
- Provides rapid follow-up observations that enable discoveries across the global astronomy community.
- Avoids a capability gap that would impact missions and facilities including Rubin and future multi-messenger campaigns.

Status

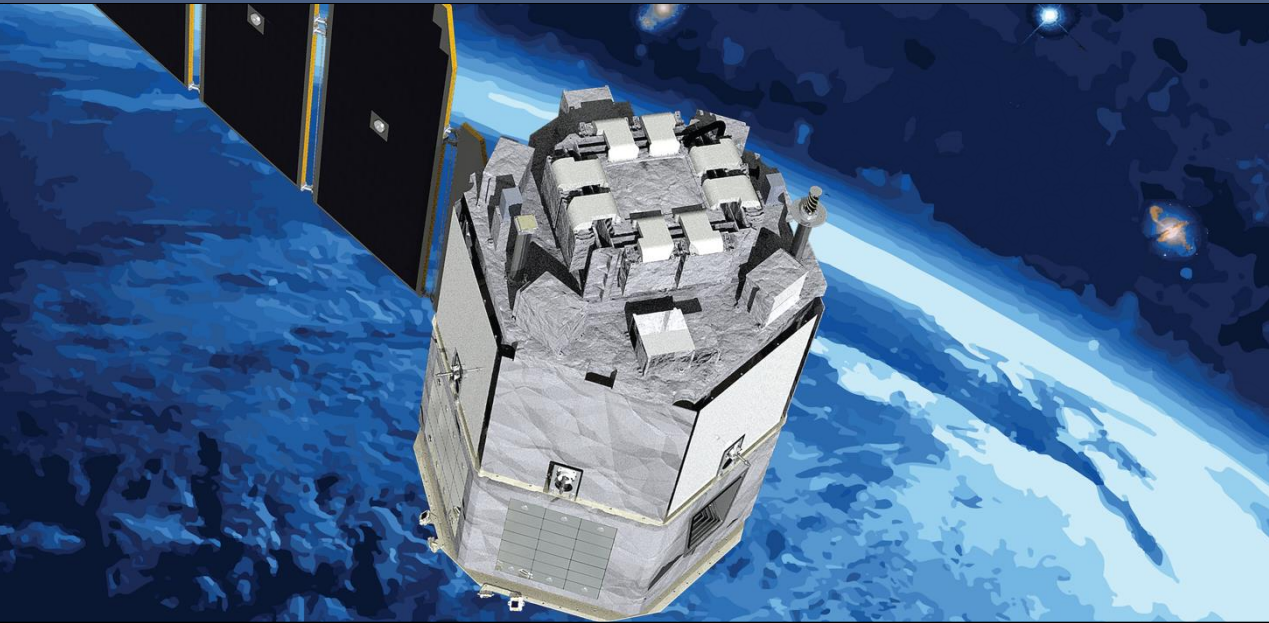
- Katalyst completed successful environmental testing at GSFC.
- Integrated with Pegasus at WFF and flown to Kwajalein for launch. The launch window opens today.
- The Swift observatory has successfully implemented drag reduction operations to preserve altitude until rendezvous with Swiftly.



Preparation for Roman Shipping

- Fully tested: Roman Observatory team has successfully completed all environmental testing; completed final comprehensive performance test
- Fully capable: Roman performance on-orbit should be exquisite – as good or better than all requirements
- On Schedule: Roman remains on track to launch ahead of schedule – window expected to open on August 30, 2026

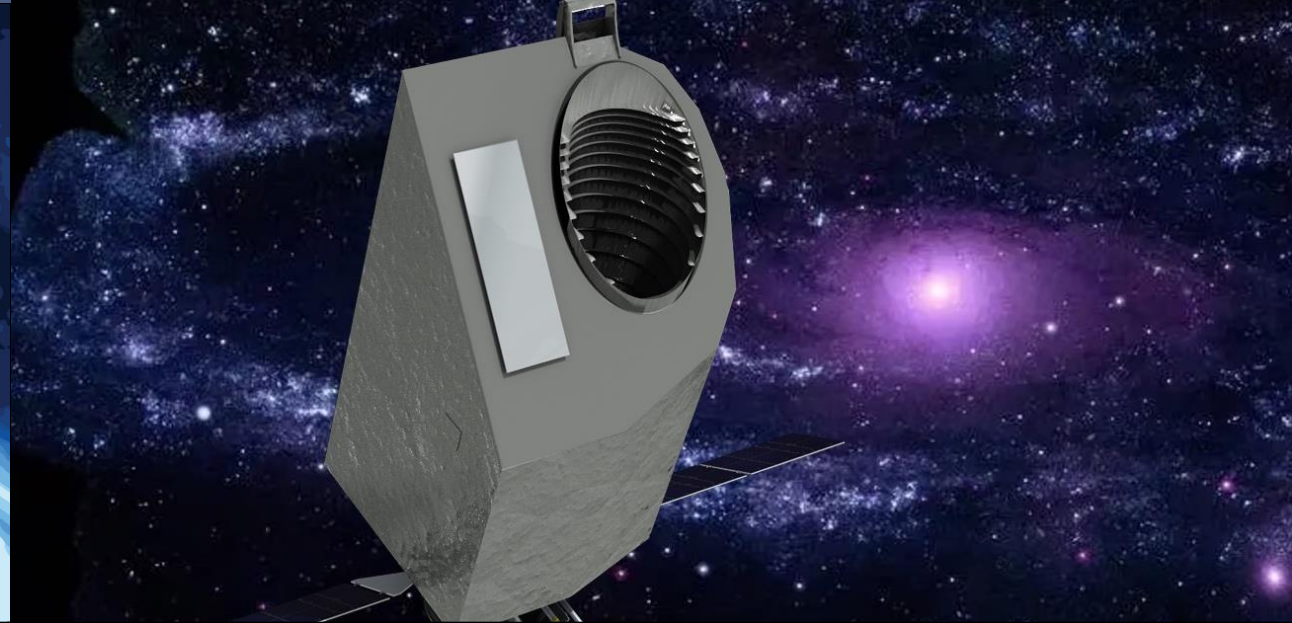




COSI

Launch NET 2027

A wide-field gamma-ray telescope that will study energetic phenomena in the Milky Way and beyond, including the creation and destruction of matter and antimatter and the final stages of the lives of stars.



UVEX

Launch NET 2030

UVEX is a new NASA Medium Explorer mission to explore the ultraviolet sky, with an expected launch date in 2030.

PDR expected in July 2026.

HWO acquisition strategy with NASA Goddard as prime with 75% of funds going external to NASA.

- NASA sets and maintains mission requirements throughout mission lifecycle
- NASA as prime enables earlier and broader involvement from partners by procuring multiple openly competed subsystem contracts that align with partner's capabilities and expertise
- NASA as prime enables less layers of overhead, thus minimizing cost.

Accelerating time to Science

Working with partners to develop key, critical technologies early

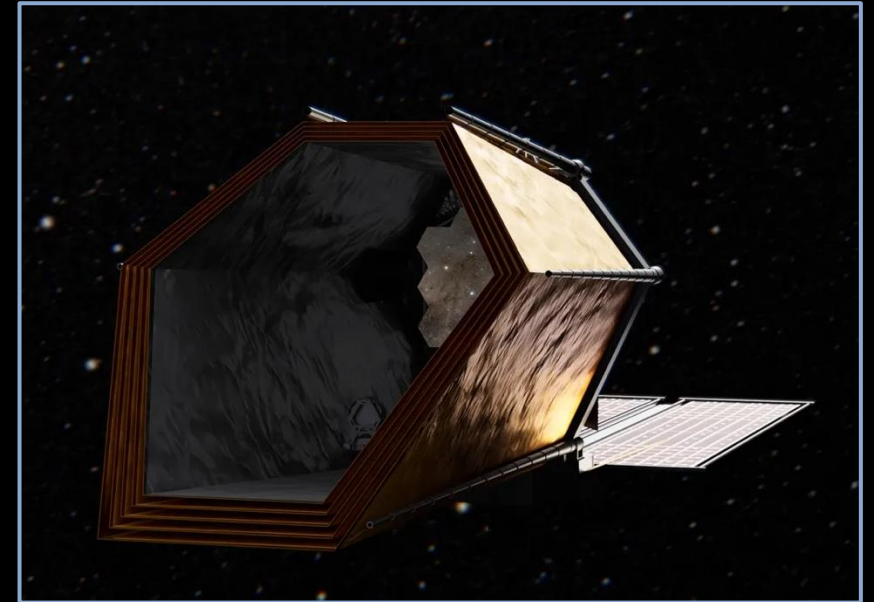
- A key finding of the NASA Large Mission Study is early technology maturation saves time.
- HWO is funding seven industry-led studies to help mature core technologies before Mission Concept Review (MCR)

Working with partners to explore the architect trade space thoroughly

- HWO is funding five industry-led studies to help explore and evaluate the architecture trade space.
- Investigating how in-space servicing, demonstrated with great success on Hubble, could help accelerate the launch of HWO.

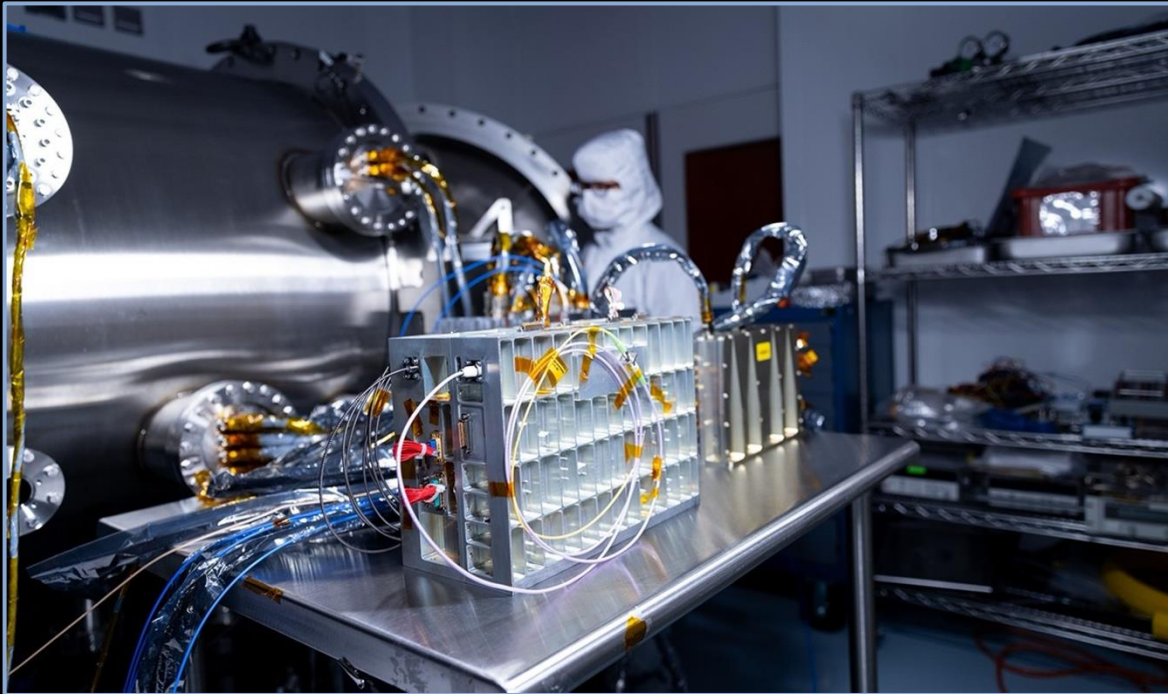
Exploring how AI tools can help accelerate both the design process as well as the evaluation of architectures and concepts

Engaging with academia and industry to evaluate science instrument concepts ahead of MCR



Recent Accomplishments:

- NASA successfully completed Key Decision Point B, which is a significant milestone, authorizing the mission to continue into Phase B.
- The Telescope Structural Models completed fabrication & testing at NASA and were delivered to OHB/ESA in Germany



Prototype laser optical module testing



June 21-26: 16th International LISA Symposium
in College Park, MD

Overview

- NASA has released the 2026 Astrophysics Small Explorer Announcement of Opportunity
- SMEX missions are PI-led, cost-capped space missions that address focused astrophysics science priorities
- The 2026 AO adopts a single-step selection process and streamlined early development to improve efficiency
- Updates reflect community feedback and lessons learned, supporting cost, schedule, and risk discipline
- SMEX supports Decadal Survey priorities by enabling timely, competed missions within the NASA Astrophysics Explorers Program

Notional Timeline

- Final AO Release: June 9, 2026
- Mission Selection: ~Early 2027
- Launch Readiness: By ~2031



Questions: Dan Moses, Astrophysics Small Explorers Program Lead Scientist, dan.moses@nasa.gov and E. Lucien Cox, Astrophysics Small Explorers Program Executive, elbert.l.cox@nasa.gov using subject line “APD 2026 SMEX CA”

Welcome to the
APSMEX26 Pre-Proposal Conference