# 2026 Astrophysics Small Explorer Program Solicitation Pre-Proposal Conference

## Expectations for Phase A&B

**June 30, 2026**

**Lucien Cox (elbert.l.cox@nasa.gov)**

**APSMEX26 AO Lead Program Executive**

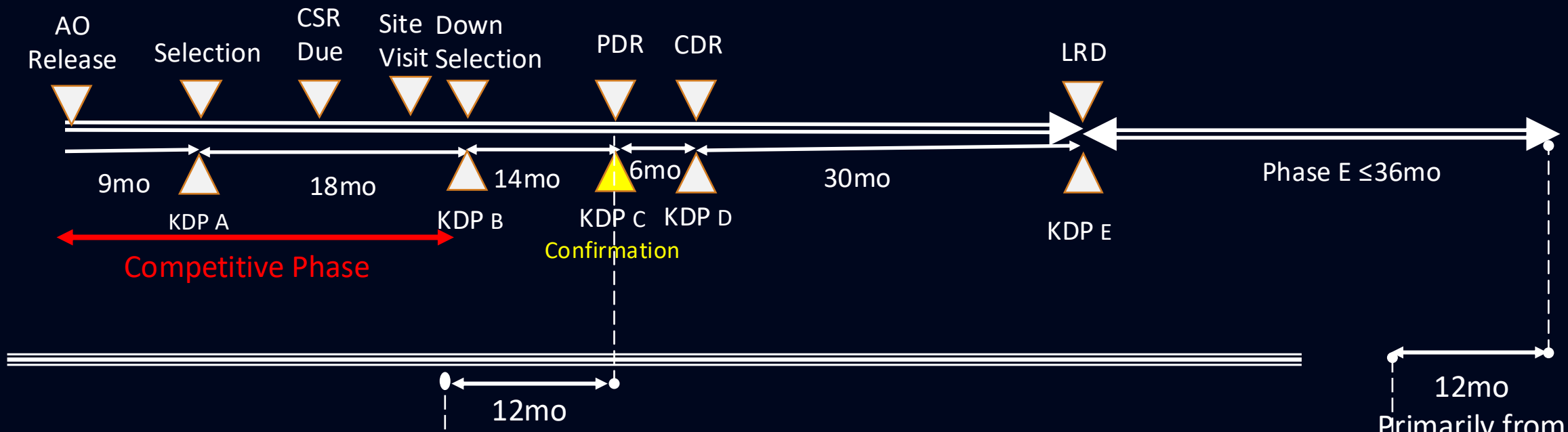
# Expectations: Selection to Confirmation

| "Nominal" SMEX AO to LRD (Durations in Months) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2 step | AO Release | 1 step | **Reviews 1-step** |
| Pre-Phase A | 3 | Proposal Development | 3 | Submit Proposal |
| | 6 | Review & Selection | 6 | Mission Selection |
| Cumulative Pre-Phase A | 9 | KDP-A | 9 | |
| Phase A | 1 | Kickoff | 1 | Kickoff |
| | 9 | CSR | 6 | |
| | 6 | Eval & Site Visit | | |
| | 2 | Finalize Eval for Down Select | | SRR/MDR |
| Cumulative Phase A | 18 | KDP-B | 7 | |
| Phase B | 1 | bridge | | |
| | 12 | Design Formulation | 12 | |
| | 1 | PDR & Confirmation | 1 | PDR |
| Cumulative Phase B | 14 | KDP-C | 13 | |
| Phase C/D | 36 | Development & Integration | 36 | CDR<br>MRR |
| Cumulative Phase C/D | 36 | LRD | 36 | |
| | 77 | AO to LRD | 65 | |

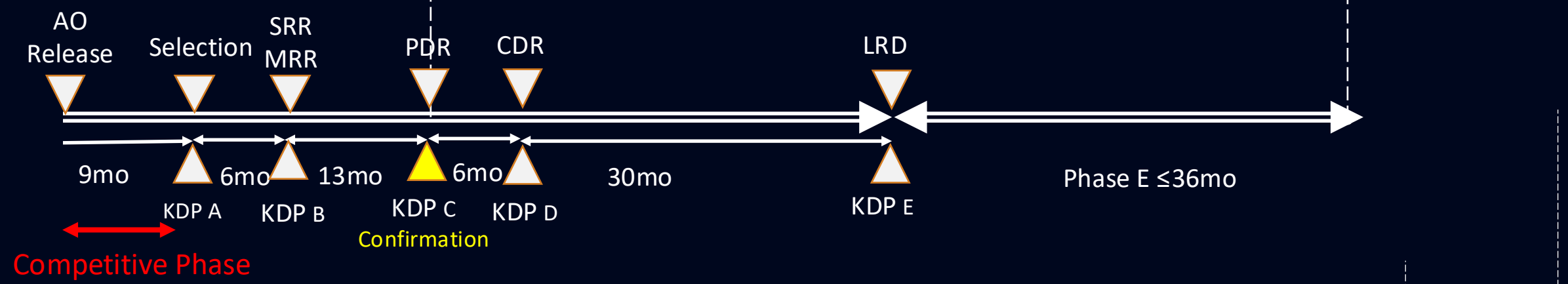
**SMEX 2026 Initiative:** Reduce time from proposal submission to science return

- Acceleration achieved in 1 step compared to 2 step process is primarily achieved via non-competitive Phase A
  - No CSR, Evaluation, Site Visit, or Down Selection (competitive work)
  - Added focus on SRR, MDR, and entrance & exit criteria for KDP-B
- Standing Review Board (SRB) interaction from beginning of Phase A - *collaborative*
- Support from Program Office from beginning of Phase A – *collaborative*
- "Light touch" KDP-B gate
- 1 year improvement in schedule results in APSMEX26 achieving the same LRD as APSMX25

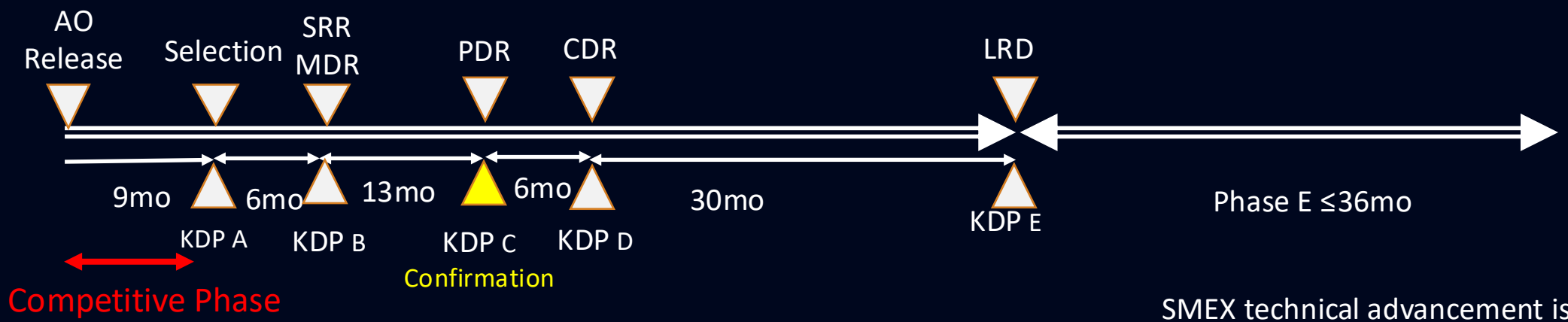
# 2 Step Process: 77 months from AO release to LRD

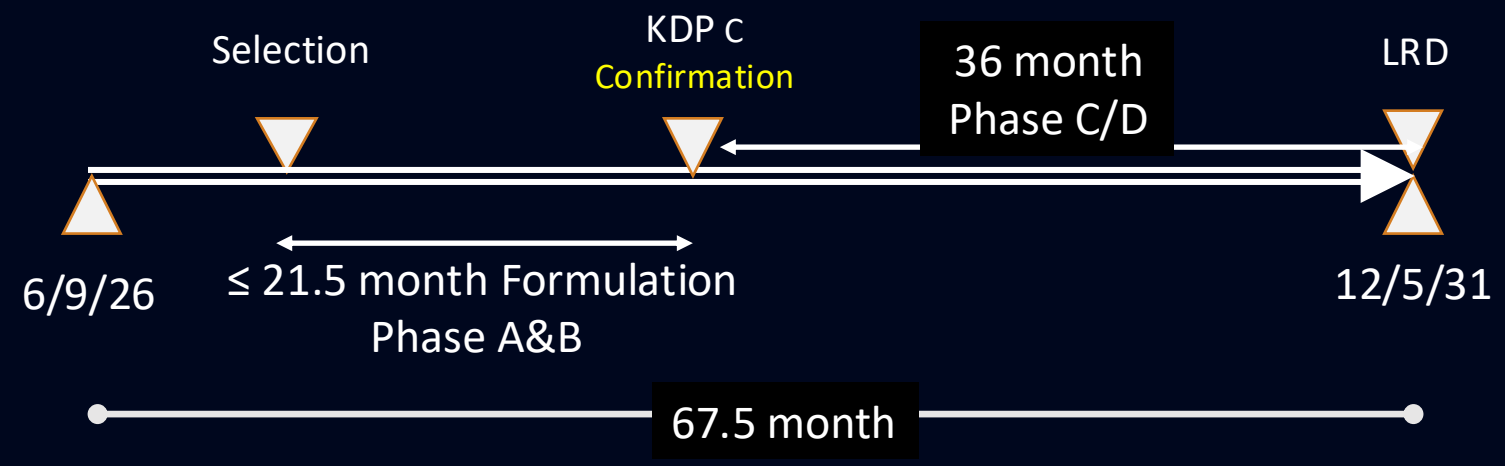



# 1 Step Process: 65 months from AO release to LRD



# 1 step flexibility in accommodating technical development




SMEX technical advancement is encouraged

- Require TRL=6 at PDR/KDP C

For Extensive Technical Maturation

- Expand Phase A&B
  - Up 21.5 months to retain full 36 month Phase C/D
  - For longer development, reduce Phase C/D
- Minimize Phase A formulation to access part of Phase A&B without a specific cap