



# **Strategic Communications Workshop**

## **Summary Report**

October 11 – 13, 2006 Washington DC

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# Goals and Objectives of NASA's Strategic Communications Workshop



- Establish a strategic communications framework to include message architecture, new outreach mechanisms, and strategies for implementation.

*Sub-goal 1* – Build support throughout the agency for strategic communications plan and activities

*Sub-goal 2* – Encourage creative input and ideas for strategic communications plans and programs

*Sub-goal 3* – Identify new audiences and message delivery mechanisms

- A written questionnaire was completed by each participant before the sessions.

## Methodology



- The NASA Strategic Communications Workshop was held in Washington October 11-13, 2006, with 79 participants to include but not limited to communications, legislative affairs, outreach, science and Public Affairs.
- The workshop consisted of guest speakers and structured breakout sessions. For the breakout sessions, participants were divided into 4 groups with approximately 20 individuals in each group.
- Breakout sessions were moderated by JANSON and were conducted on four strategic communications topics:

*What's the right message?*

*Internal communications*

*Leveraging partnerships and developing new ones*

*Communicating without the press release*

- Each of the four groups participated in each of the four breakout sessions.

## Executive Summary – Audiences and Messages



- Two target audiences are perceived as the top priorities for NASA:
  - 1) **Congress** – important because of appropriations and financial/political support; and
  - 2) **Youth** – viewed as vital to the future of the space program, both in terms of public support and future staffing.
- The key “promises” or benefits are seen as **Advancing Knowledge and Scientific Discovery**
- Suggestions for what NASA should be telling the public generally fall into the following thematic categories:
  - Relevance** – NASA’s impact on everyday life
  - Inspiration** – Encourage the dream of possibility
  - Leadership** – U.S. setting the example and leading the journey
  - Knowledge** – Supporting advancement and technology
  - Discovery** – The destiny to explore

## Executive Summary – What's the Right Message



- Top-level tag lines and themes:
  - 1) *Imagine Your Future.*
  - 2) *Pioneering the Future Through Exploration.*
  - 3) *NASA Opens and Explores New Frontiers to Benefit All.*
  - 4) *Pushing the Boundaries of Our World to Explore New Ones.*
  - 5) *Exploring New Worlds While Improving Our Own.*

# Executive Summary – What's the Right Message (continued)



## Elevator Speech:

- NASA explores and discovers to answer questions about the universe and our place in it. We're going out to stay and the benefits are better technology, economic security, and a cleaner, safer home planet.
- 1) **As applied to Congress:** The American people benefit from better technology, economic security and a cleaner, safer home planet.
  - 2) **As applied to Industry:** Working closely with industry, we will all benefit from better technology, economic security and a cleaner, safer home planet.
  - 3) **As applied to Seniors:** We spark technology developments like medical imaging that improve health and people's overall quality of life:
  - 4) **As applied to Students:** We do "cool stuff" that you can be a part of. Right now, we're building new rockets to take use to the Moon, Mars and beyond.
  - 5) **As applied to Teachers:** We're going to give you thrilling things to teach your kids.

## **Executive Summary – What's the Right Message (continued)**



### **Elevator Speech:**

- NASA makes air travel safer, faster and more accessible. We build and operate space vehicles to expand our knowledge of the universe and search for answers to life's most compelling questions. Our work benefits everyone by producing breakthroughs in medicine, transportations, education and a host of other areas that touch our everyday lives. We demonstrate continued American technological leadership to the rest of the world. We support our national defense by making technological breakthroughs in aeronautics, spacecraft and even maritime technology. We build bridges of peace and partnerships with other countries. And we do all this with less than 1% of the Federal budget.



## **Executive Summary – What's the Right Message (continued)**



### **Elevator Speech:**

- NASA opens and explores new frontiers to benefit all.
  - 1) WHAT: Leadership/Exploration/Discovery
  - 2) WHO: Innovative People
  - 3) HOW: Through Inspiration, Innovation and Space Exploration
  - 4) WHY: To Reap Benefits for all Humankind; To Improve Life on Earth for the Future of Humanity
  - 5) WHERE: In Space and In New Frontiers

## Executive Summary – What's the Right Message (continued)



### Elevator Speech:

- NASA builds America's future by exploring new worlds while improving our own.
  - 1) **As applied to Exploration:** Through exploration of our universe we continue to shape our destiny and define our character. This quest has brought tangible benefits that improve our lives by Aviation Safety, Weather Forecasting, Communications, Computing and Search and Rescue.
  - 2) **As applied to Aerospace:** NASA builds America's future by exploring new worlds while improving our own. Think about the history of flight – from Kitty Hawk and now to Mars! We continue the legacy of innovation by creating new methods of air travel. And along the way, we are creating benefits for everyone.
  - 3) **As applied to Science:** Imagine your future where we have improved the air we breath and the water we drink. Where we better understand the changes in our climate to protect ourselves from severe weather. Where we have opened new frontiers to knowledge of our solar system and universe: Earth, Sun and Astrophysics.

## Executive Summary – What's the Right Message (continued)



### Elevator Speech:

- NASA builds America's future by exploring new worlds while improving our own.
- 4) **As applied to Education:** We are working to put cutting edge science into our school's textbooks. We're providing hands-on engineering and technology opportunities for kids, giving them a chance to interact with real hardware in space and equipping you and all teachers with the tools and knowledge to take your students on a virtual field trip to the moon. Imagine by the time your current students are grown up, humans will be living on the moon and exploring Mars...and that field trip may be a reality.
- 5) **As applied to Finance:** NASA is America's long term investment in the future. For less than 1% of the Federal budget, NASA helps American companies stay ahead of global competitors, opens new industries and markets, creates technical jobs right here in the U.S. and every dollar spent on space is invested on Earth.

## Executive Summary – Internal Communications



- Participants desire a combination of electronic/paperless communications and face-to-face interaction, supplemented by supporting resources.
- They want NASA internal communications to be:
  - Efficient** – short, concise, accurate and timely
  - Automated/Instant** – proactive, automatic messaging to NASA staff
  - Interactive** – opportunity to ask questions
  - Electronic Dialog** – electronic resource available for staff to seek additional information

## Executive Summary – Leveraging Partnerships and Developing New Ones



- NASA's internal approval structures are viewed as posing a significant barrier to partnerships and more creative external communication. This is viewed as particularly challenging given the need to be more creative and proactive to successfully reach the a younger audience.
- Greatest opportunities for effective NASA partnerships are perceived as:
  - Industry partners with mutually beneficial synergies
  - Traditional Media partners, including the mainstream and trade press
  - Youth-oriented media partners, including television and multimedia organizations
  - Sports organization partnerships

## Executive Summary – External Communications



- NASA's current bureaucracy and restrictive policies are perceived to limit effective communication with key audience groups.
- Participants call for a clear, concise, focused message to be developed at HQ level, then personnel empowered at field level to implement. Additional resources are needed for accomplishing effective external communications.
- The greatest opportunities with key youth audience are technology-based: **podcasts, interactive technologies, gaming, and television programming partnerships.**
- The NASA Web site is perceived favorably, with improvement needed in its search capabilities, streamlined content/navigation and additional youth-focused content.



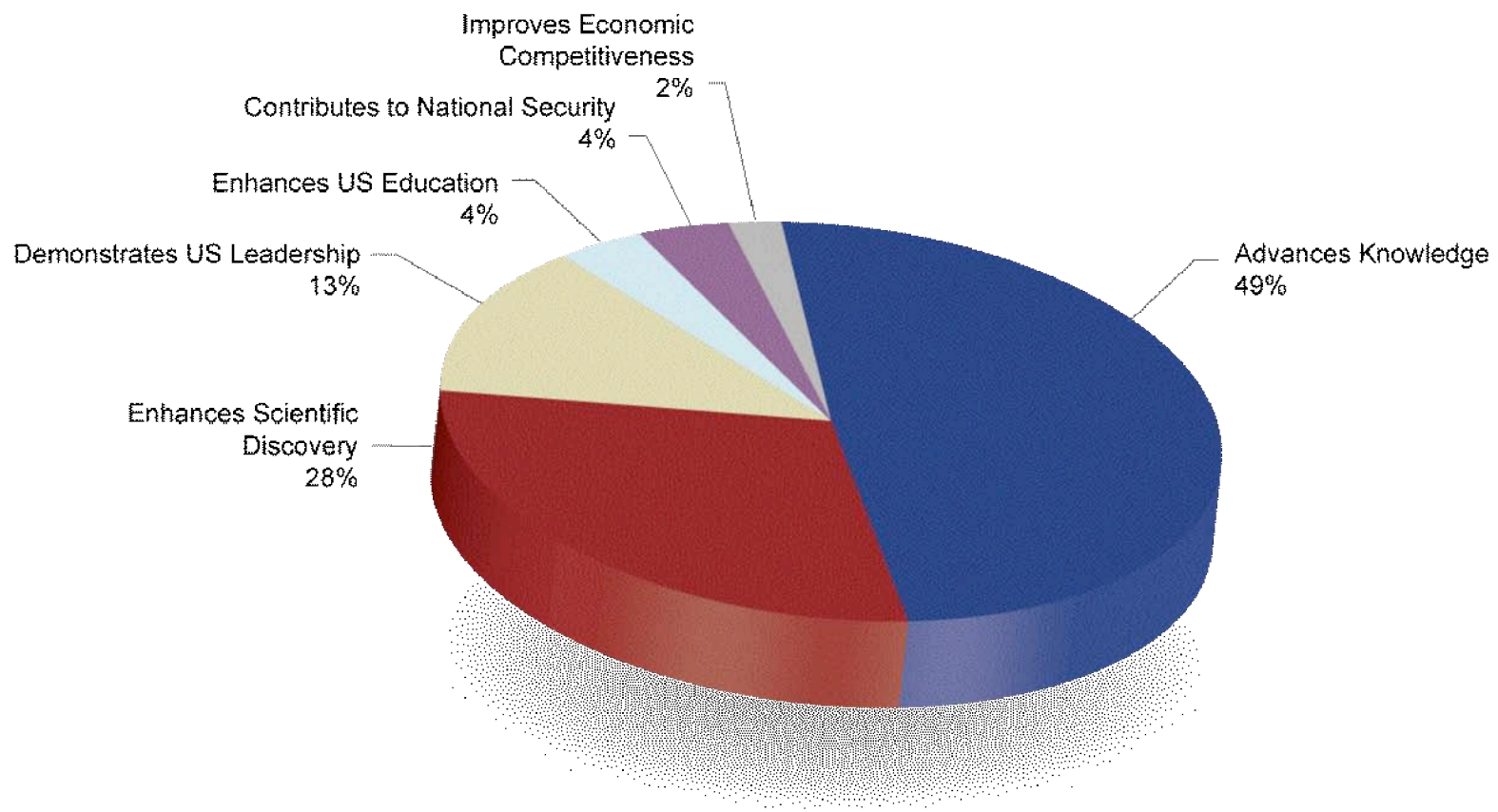
## Findings – NASA's Mission and the Vision for Space Exploration

- Participants had a consistent view of NASA's mission and its vision. Most quote the NASA Strategic Plan **"to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research."** Some mention protecting the earth, improving life for Americans or mankind and advancing technology. A few see NASA's mission as inspiring the next generation.
- When asked to describe their understanding of the Vision for Space Exploration, the most frequent responses were:  
**1) to return to the moon, 2) to reach Mars, 3) to explore and understand and 4) to complete the International Space Station**
- "Moon, Mars and Beyond" was quoted frequently, as was retiring the Space Shuttle, developments in robotics, extending human presence in the universe, launching CEV, and advancing U.S. interests. A few refer to the Vision for Space Exploration as a roadmap for NASA moving forward.
- A few people expressed that NASA has no clear vision at this time or is currently "off track."

## Findings – Key Promise or Benefit



When asked to select from a list the *key* “promise” or benefit the NASA provides to the public, almost half of the participants indicated that Knowledge Acquisition is paramount





## Findings – Key Promise or Benefit (continued)



- Several participants volunteered “other” key promises or benefits from NASA:
  - Technology transfer for everyday benefits
  - Flight safely
  - Improves human condition
  - Enables a future we create, rather than accept one created for us
  - Expresses hope for the future of humankind
  - Meaningful use of tax money
  - Excitement/sense of adventure
  - Pride in the American culture
  - Advancing technology through science and flight research
  - Satisfies human exploration and need to know
  - Extends civilization into cosmos
  - "Charts the way" for the American people to follow
  - Realizes the dream of exploration



## Findings – The Perception of the Public’s View of NASA’s Mission

- Scientific Discovery and Advancing Knowledge are perceived to be equally important.
- NASA’s role in demonstrating U.S. leadership is also viewed as very important to the public. Perceived as less important to the general public are NASA’s contribution to National Security and economic competitiveness.
- As one participant eloquently expressed it: “NASA, at its best, is America at its best. It’s about courage, sacrifice, discovery, triumph and failure. In short, the higher pursuits of the human condition.”



## Findings – The Perception of the Public’s View of NASA’s Mission (continued)

- When asked to express in their own words the message that NASA should be conveying to the public about the agency and what it stands for, comments fall into five general thematic categories:

### Relevance

- How NASA impacts/improves lives now and in the future
- How discoveries support medical advancements and robotics, technology
- Explain how NASA impacts/provides value for taxpayer dollars
- Tell people what NASA has done for them since Apollo

### Inspiration

- NASA missions encourage people to dream and hope
- Inspires the next generation of explorers
- Possibility, courage, energize, sense of adventure, engage
- NASA programs have a “cool” factor, especially for youth
- Fulfills human potential



# Findings – The Perception of the Public’s View of NASA’s Mission (continued)

## Leadership

- NASA exploration makes it a safer world
- NASA changes the future
- NASA maintains U.S. edge
- Job creation – both at NASA and within support industries
- Promotes international cooperation

## Knowledge

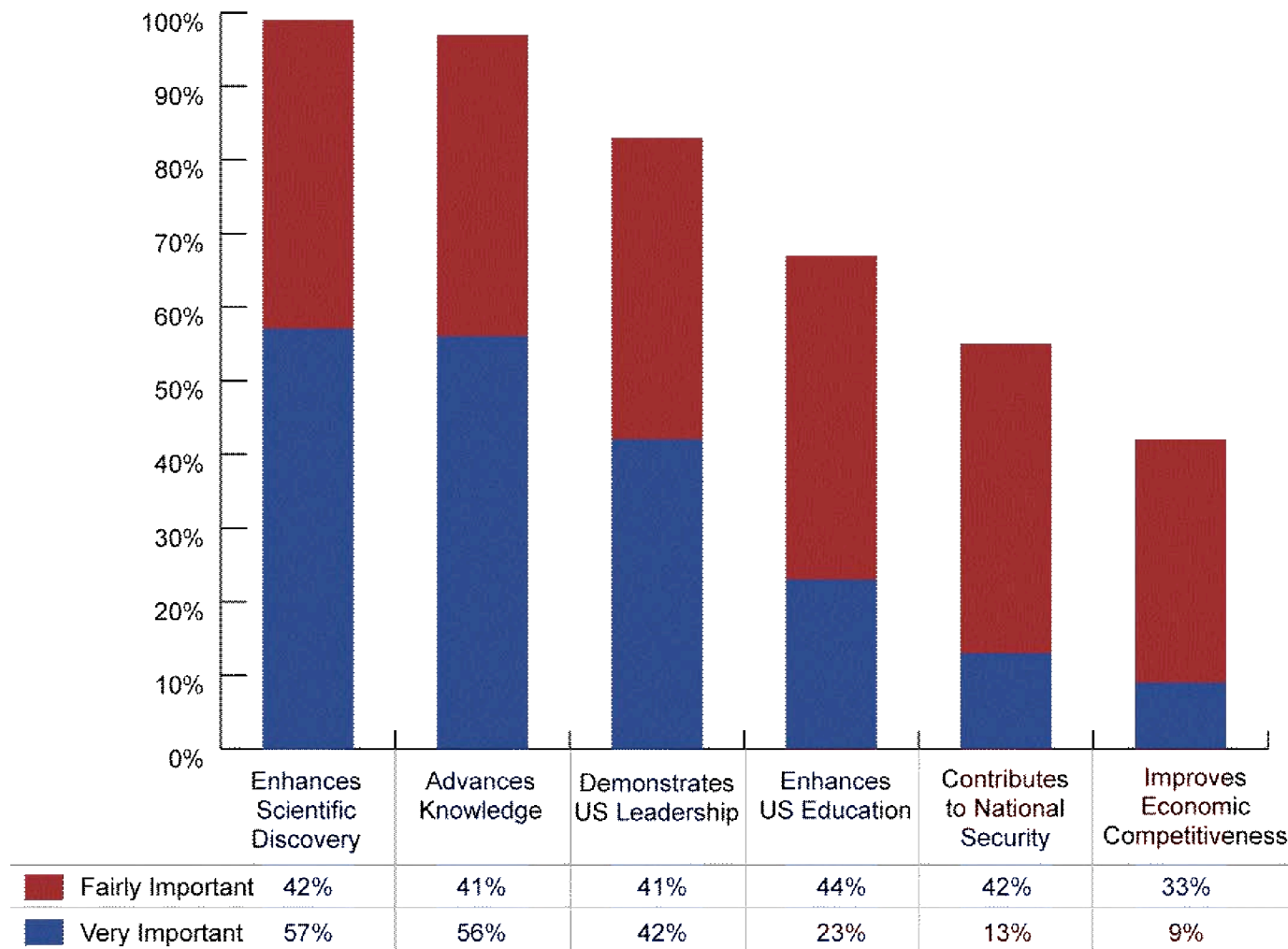
- NASA is the world leader in technology and science
- Exploration = advancement
- Promotes learning and benefits education
- Advances aeronautics and earth science
- Teaches/reinforces the “fun” of math and science

## Discover

- Continues the legacy of exploration
- U.S. as a pioneer: “We explore because it’s our destiny as human beings”
- “NASA is the doorway to exploration”



## Findings – The Perception of the Public's View of NASA's Mission (continued)

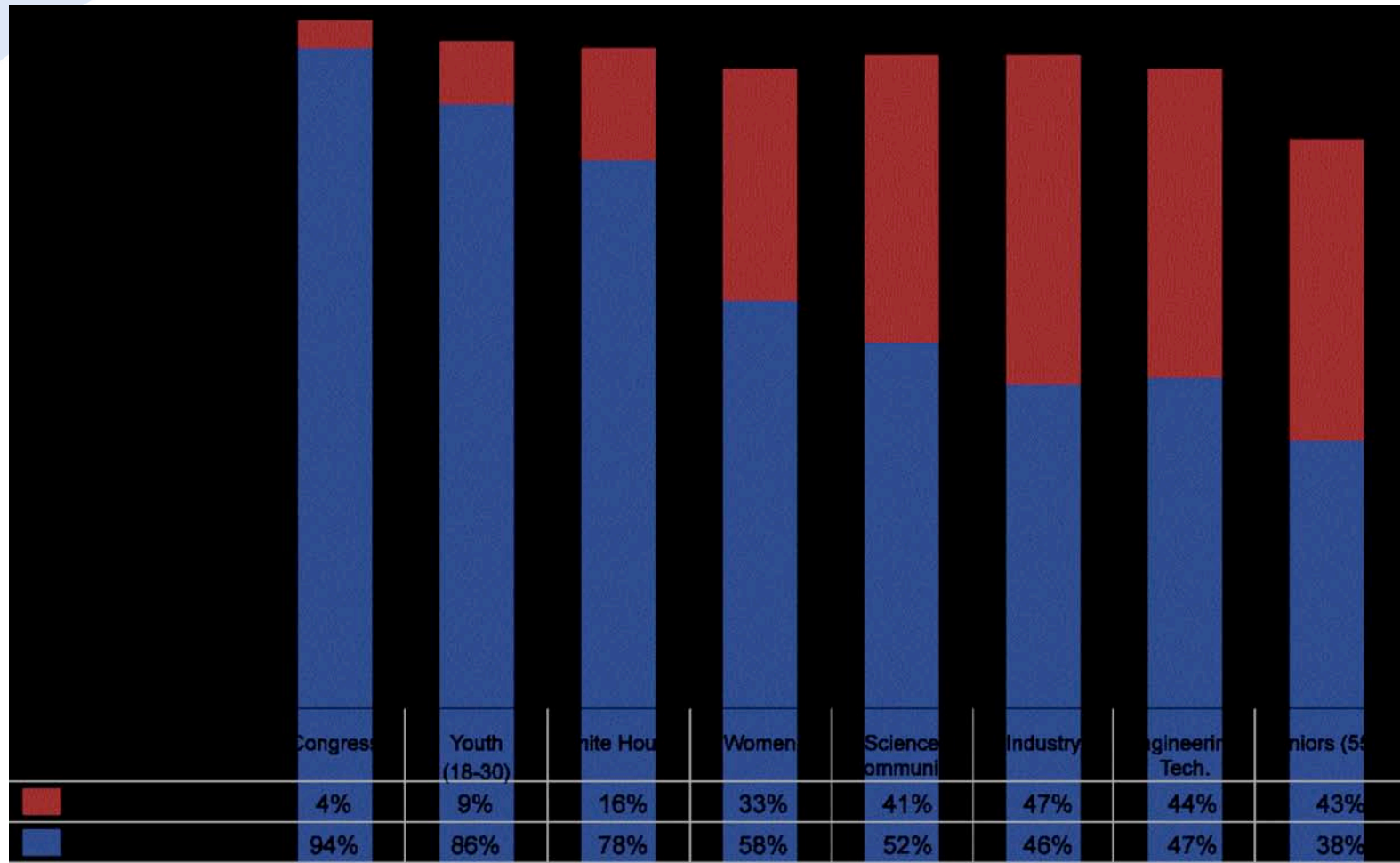


## Findings – Target Audiences



- Congress is perceived by participants to be the most critical, followed by youth.
- Asked to assess NASA's effectiveness at communicating its mission and goals to the target audiences on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest rating):
  - 11% rated NASA above average (rating of 4 or 5)
  - 49% rated NASA average (rating of 3)
  - 39% rated NASA below average (rating of 1 or 2)
- Participants tended to view the traditional communication mechanisms and approaches as “working.” What they perceive as “not working” tends to include new audiences, new technologies, and new approaches.

## Findings – Target Audiences (continued)



# Findings – Target Audiences (continued)



## What's Working:

- Communication with the White House and Capitol Hill
- Brand recognition
- Strong reputation
- Recognizable logo
- Great video and photographic imagery
- Communication with the science community
- Education programs
- NASA Web site (mentioned as both "working" and "not working")
- Good at communicating with those already "on board" with NASA

## What's Not Working:

- Not effectively reaching youth market
- Not communicating relevance of NASA
- Inconsistent message across centers
- Too focused on "events"
- Too narrowly focused
- Stuck in Apollo era
- Not using new technologies (i.e. ipod, youtube)
- Bureaucracy
- Public apathy/low awareness of mission
- NASA appears remote and removed from the public
- Not effectively reaching minorities
- NASA Web site suboptimal



## Findings – Target Audiences (continued)



- Suggestions to measure the effectiveness and success of the NASA's communication efforts include:
  - Focus group and market research results (i.e., measure awareness of programs)
  - Media coverage – number of NASA mentions in TV shows, commercials, newspaper articles
  - Web site hits/video downloads
  - Student interest in space exploration; intern applications
  - Number of students pursuing degrees in math, science and engineering
  - Level of Congressional funding
  - Participation in public events – contests, astronaut public appearances
  - Ask friends and family

## Findings – Internal Communications



- Emails were listed as the most effective form of communication, followed by staff and all-hands meetings, activity lists near elevators and NASA TV and Web site.
- About one in ten volunteered that NASA's internal communication is poor, not useful and ineffective.
- Access to Web sites, newsletters and NASA TV, where employees can seek specific information is vital. Some cite a source of internal information as word-of-mouth from peers.
- A few suggest looking at best practices of other organizations and conducting an internal employee communication audit prior to adopting new communication methods.

## Findings – Internal Communications (continued)



- The majority of suggested improvements for internal NASA communications fall into four general areas:

### Efficiency

- Short, concise, accurate and timely
- Streamline what we have already and stop reinventing

### Automated/Instant

- Outgoing messages and alerts, daily emails, text messaging, pop-ups, podcasts, NASA “question of the day”

### Interactive

- Face-to-face interaction with dialog opportunity, brown bag luncheons, more all-hands meetings

### Electronic Dialog

- Blogs (mentioned frequently), NASA intranet as automatic homepage with daily bulletins are effective ways to convey information from top management

## Findings – Leveraging Partnership and Developing New Ones



- Participant suggestions for leveraging partnerships with commercial and private sector entities:
  - Look at successful partnering arrangements achieved by other agencies such as the National Park Service and the Museum Alliance
  - Increased use of media outlets – including press releases and public service announcements
  - Television programming aimed at the youth market – partnerships with the Discovery channel or other youth networks
  - Partnerships with sports organizations – NASCAR, NBA, NFL, MLB
  - Relax restrictions on partners' use of the NASA "meatball" logo
  - Capitalize on NASA's brand strength and recognition
  - Develop education partners
  - Utilize contractor relationships to promote NASA message
  - Partner with non-profit/non-space sectors



## Findings – External Communications: Communicating Without the Press Release

- When asked to assess the agency's effectiveness in using current technologies to communicate with target audiences, NASA garners average ratings.
  - 19% rated NASA above average (rating of 4 or 5)
  - 42% rated NASA average (rating of 3)
  - 39% rated NASA below average (rating of 1 or 2)
- Several commented that using technology is especially important in communicating with the youth audience.
- Negative comments made about existing external communications include:
  - NASA TV – called bad, boring, goofy, embarrassing and amateurish
  - Press release process is slow
  - Lack of staff dedicated to the external communication function; need to create functional "ownership" position/role
  - NASA is supposed to be cutting-edge, but does not demonstrate any ability to lead in using technology to communicate
  - Current external communication content is not engaging



# Findings – External Communications: Communicating Without the Press Release (continued)

- Suggestions for communication methods include:

## Entertainment opportunities

- Advertising
- Promote NASA presence on network television and/or public television, i.e. Discover and Digital Learning Network
- Offer more downloads and on-demand options
- Public service announcements (PSA)
- Radio
- NASA brand placement and relationships with the Motion Picture Association

## Technology Opportunities

- Podcasting, blogs, text messaging, youtube
- NASA TV improvements
- NASA e-magazine

## Events

- Congressional events such as receptions
- Astronaut events – ribbon cuttings, photo ops, special appearances
- Speakers bureaus
- Contests
- Town Hall meetings



## **Findings – External Communications: Communicating Without the Press Release (continued)**

- Other suggestions for communication methods (cont'd):

### **Suggestions on messaging and targeting tactics**

- Use web content to target youth age group
- Interactive multimedia and gaming to attract youth
- Educational programs with universities; involve regional education boards
- Use a story-telling approach to convey NASA message more effectively

### **Suggestions relating to NASA's internal and political structures**

- Better coordinate agency resources for communication
- Streamline and standardize processes
- Cut down on NASA bureaucracy and approval processes

### **Message development and communication**

- Convey a relevant and consistent message
- Focus on substance and tangible benefits in message development

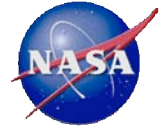
## Findings – NASA Web Site



- Overall, comments regarding the NASA.gov Web site were positive. The Web site is perceived to have great visuals, as well as rich and extensive content. Several people commented that the site has improved significantly in the past three years.
- Suggestions for improving the Web site:
  - Search engine tool** – viewed by most as the “weak link” on the NASA Web site; several suggest partnering with Google to refine NASA search capabilities within the site.
  - Not user friendly/hard to navigate** – too much information, too many layers, too many pages and no central site for organization.
  - Not timely** – out-of-date links, content not updated frequently.
  - Inconsistencies between NASA centers** – content format is different from center to center; some centers more easily navigated than others.
  - Adult- and news-focused** – the site is called stodgy, bureaucratic, governmental and boring.
  - Not interactive** – suggest including blogs, making the site more youth-oriented and incorporating interactive educational opportunities.
  - Create mechanism to drive traffic to the site** – once there, promote repeat visitation.



## Findings – Facilitator Top-Level Strategic Observations



- NASA would benefit from development of a single unified message and a strategic core message platform with multiple voices aligned on a core theme.
- Vision is characterized as tactical rather than strategic and not broadly applicable for message development.
- Participants perceive “silos” and a lack of timely information sharing between centers and HQ.
- Participants desire improved internal communication methods to support synergistic learning and resource management.
- Sharing best practices and effective materials between centers and across the agency will lead to more effective external communications.
- Engaging youth and attracting the next generation of human resources for NASA is vital.
- Employees would prefer streamlined internal methods to receive information rather than [nasawatch.com](http://nasawatch.com), which was provided as a consistent source.

## **Findings – Facilitator Top-Level Strategic Observations (continued)**



- Create an environment that facilitates spokespersons/champions – Who is the next Carl Sagan?
- Maintain the collaboration and engagement of workshop participants in a consistent and ongoing forum to improve communications internally and externally.
- Capitalize on strong NASA brand and renewed interest in space exploration to re-educate and engage the American public and key stakeholders.