

SPACE ACTIVITY AND SOCIETY (E5)
Space Expectations: How the Public Views Space Activities (2)

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A PARTICIPATORY SPACE EXPLORATION CASE STUDY: GOOGLE LUNAR X PRIZE

Abstract

The X PRIZE Foundation is committed to bringing about “radical breakthroughs for the benefit of humanity” through the proven practice of incentive prizes. This model identifies the principal impediments to progress—whether a lack of established commercial markets or the need for advances in technology—and breaks down those barriers by setting defined goals that are difficult but achievable and providing an award for that achievement. In this way, breakthroughs are no longer discussed in terms of whether they will be accomplished or not, but when they will be accomplished, and who will be the first to reach the finish line. The benefit of incentive prizes then goes far beyond a single cash prize, as that purse is exponentially leveraged into research, education, and development: every dollar of the purse is transformed into 2.5 dollars in team investment, multiplied by the number of competing teams for returns upwards of 10 to 20 times the prize value.

Currently, the X PRIZE Foundation and Google have partnered to create the Google Lunar X PRIZE, a \$30 million incentive prize for the first privately funded team to safely land a vehicle on the lunar surface, traverse a minimum distance of 500m, and return high-definition images, video, and data back to Earth. The purpose of this prize is twofold: firstly, to force a paradigm shift in the methods by which lunar exploration and research is conducted from a technical and entrepreneurial perspective, and moreover to fundamentally reverse the longstanding perception amongst the public that space exploration is a strictly governmental institution. As such, the Google Lunar X PRIZE includes a broad-reaching education and outreach program designed to engage the public in dialog about the changing ecosystem of space entrepreneurship.

The primary method used to date to engage the public in the Google Lunar X PRIZE is through online and social media. Specifically aimed at an emerging generation of space enthusiasts, the program utilizes the incredible power and accessibility of blogs; streaming video; interactive tools such as maps, wikis, and forums; and a vast array of social networking tools designed to facilitate conversation in a variety of forms. Traditional methods of outreach have focused on strategic blasts of information, whereas this method utilizes steady streams of multidirectional information transfer: the “push” methodology is no longer relevant in a world accustomed to creating its own information. Indeed the power of these technologies is not in their ability to disseminate information, but in their ability to produce it - to promote consumption *and* creation of knowledge. The outreach programs of the Google Lunar X PRIZE serve to inspire and motivate the public through ongoing engagement and extended participation.