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Space Expectations: Involving the Public in Space Activities (2)

Author: Mr. Douglas Comstock

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), United States, doug.comstock@nasa.gov

Mr. Andrew Petro

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), United States, Andrew.J.Petro@nasa.gov

NASA'S CENTENNIAL CHALLENGES PROGRAM – PRIZES AS A MEANS OF PARTICIPATORY
EXPLORATION.

Abstract

The Centennial Challenges program seeks innovative solutions to technical problems that can drive progress in aerospace technology of value to NASA's missions in space operations, science, exploration and aeronautics. Centennial Challenges encourage the participation of independent teams, individual inventors, student groups and private companies of all sizes in aerospace research and development, and seek to find the most innovative solutions to technical challenges through competition and cooperation. NASA's original seven prize challenges have been successful in encouraging broad participation by innovators across the United States and across generations. Many of these technical challenges also have direct relevance to national and global needs such as energy and transportation.

Prize programs encourage diverse participation and multiple solution paths. A measure of diversity is seen in the geographic distribution of participants (from Hawaii to Maine) that reaches far beyond the locales of the NASA Centers and major aerospace industries. The participating teams have included individual inventors, small startup companies, and university students and professors.

Prizes also focus public attention on NASA programs and generate interest in science and engineering. Live webcasts of Centennial Challenge competitions attract thousands of viewers across the nation and around the world. The 2009 Power Beaming completion resulted in over 100 news articles and web features.