

# How can NASA establish and communicate a common, unifying vision?

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*Linda Billings, Ph.D.*

*Research Professor, School of Media and Public Affairs*

*George Washington University, Washington, DC*

*Principal Investigator, NASA Astrobiology Program*

*[Billingslinda1@gmail.com](mailto:Billingslinda1@gmail.com), <http://lindabillings.org>*

“Consider the strategic direction of the agency as set forth most recently in 2011 NASA Strategic Plan and other relevant statements of space policy issued by the President...”:

The NASA Vision (2011 NASA Strategic Plan):

“To reach for new heights and reveal the unknown, so that what we do and learn will benefit all humankind.”

Strategic goals:

- Extend and sustain human activities across the solar system.
- Expand scientific understanding of the Earth and the universe...
- Create new technology for exploration, science, “economic future.”
- Advance aeronautics research for societal benefit.
- Enable program and institutional capabilities...
- Share NASA with the public, educators, and students....

*How might NASA establish and effectively communicate a common, unifying vision for NASA's strategic direction that encompasses NASA's varied missions?*

...TO ESTABLISH A COMMON UNIFYING VISION AND  
TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE THAT VISION  
ARE TWO DIFFERENT TASKS....

## **A common, unifying vision...**

“The pioneer spirit is still vigorous within this nation. Space offers a largely unexplored hinterland for the pioneer who has the tools for this task. The rewards of space exploration both for the Nation and the individual are great. Scientific and technological progress is one essential key to our security as a nation, to our better health, to more jobs, to a higher standard of living, and to our cultural progress.”

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Letter to President Eisenhower, White House Office of Scientific Research and Development Director Vannevar Bush, July 1945  
(*Science: The Endless Frontier*):

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# Reagan Administration vision for space

“A pioneering mission for 21<sup>st</sup>-century America: to lead the exploration and development of the space frontier.”

Humankind is “destined to expand to other worlds,” and “our purpose” is to establish “free societies on new worlds.”

Toward achieving those goals, “we must stimulate individual initiative and free enterprise in space.”

(National Commission on Space, *Pioneering the Space Frontier*, 1986)

# G.H.W. Bush administration vision

“America’s space program is what civilization needs.”

America, with its tremendous resources, is uniquely qualified for leadership in space...our success will be guaranteed by the American spirit – that same spirit that tamed the North American continent and built enduring democracy.”

The “prime objective” of the U.S. space program is “to open the space frontier.”

# NASA 90-Day Study of the SEI

“The imperative to explore” is embedded in our history...traditions, and national character,” and space is “the frontier” to be explored.



# Clinton administration vision

“Space exploration has become an integral part of our national character, capturing the spirit of optimism and adventure that has defined this country from its beginnings....

Its lineage is part of an ancient heritage of the human race...deep in the human psyche and perhaps in our genes.”

# G.W. Bush Administration vision

The point of the President's Vision for Space Exploration "is to begin preparing now for a future in which the material trapped in the Sun's vicinity is available for incorporation into our way of life."

White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Director John Marburger, 2006

## NASA Administrator M. Griffin, 2005-09

The aim of space exploration is “to make the expansion and development of the space frontier an integral part of what it is that human societies do.”

When human civilization reaches the point where more people are living off the Earth than on it, “we want their culture to be Western.”

Western civilization is “the best we’ve seen so far in human history.” The values space-faring people should take into space should be Western values.

“Western ideals represent a superior set of values” that are “irretrievably linked to” expansion.

## **NASA's Office of Strategic Communications Planning “elevator speech,” 2007**

“NASA explores for answers that power our future. NASA exploration powers inspiration that engages the public and encourages students to pursue studies in challenging high-tech fields. NASA exploration powers innovation that creates new jobs, new markets, and new technologies that improve and save lives every day in every community....

NASA exploration powers discovery that enables us to better understand our Solar System and protect Earth through the study of weather and climate change, monitor the effects of the Sun and detect objects that could collide with Earth.

Why explore? ...Because exploration powers the future through inspiration, innovation, and discovery.”

# Coalition for Space Exploration

Members: [Aerojet](#), ATK, Ball, Boeing, Harris, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman. Partners: Challenger Center, Citizens for Space Exploration, National Space Society, Planetary Society.

Vision: “The exploration of space has defined what it means to be Americans—not just dreamers, but doers, not just bystanders but leaders. America continues to define what space exploration means on a global scale—a frontier for collaboration, new technologies and innovations, new jobs and industries, and inspiration through education.”

Mission: “to ensure the United States remains the leader in space, science and technology by reinforcing the value and benefits of space exploration with the public and our nation’s leaders, and building lasting support for a long-term, sustainable, strategic direction for space exploration.”

# National Space Society

“Survival of the human species” requires human expansion into space.

Values and beliefs articulated in the NSS vision for space exploration and development:

“Prosperity-unlimited resources”

“Growth-unlimited room for expansion”

Unrestricted access to space

Personal property rights

Free-market economics

Democratic values...

# Space Studies Institute

## Mission:

“Opening the energy and material resources of space for human benefit...to make possible the productive use of the abundant resources in space.”

## SSI “Space Roadmap”:

“Mine the Sky, Defend the Earth, Settle the Universe.”

# Space Frontier Foundation

“Opening the space frontier to human settlement as rapidly as possible.”

Purpose: “to unleash the power of free enterprise and lead a united humanity permanently into the Solar System.”

Goals: “protecting the Earth's fragile biosphere and creating a freer and more prosperous life for each generation by using the unlimited energy and material resources of space.”

Strategy: “wage a war of ideas in the popular culture” and transform U.S. space flight “from a government program for the few to an open frontier for everyone.”



# Mars Society

”Civilizations, like people, thrive on challenge and decay without it.... As the world moves towards unity, we must join together...facing outward to embrace a greater and nobler challenge....

Pioneering Mars will provide such a challenge.... A humans-to-Mars program would challenge young people everywhere to develop their minds to participate in the pioneering of a new world.... The settling of the Martian New World is an opportunity for a noble experiment in which humanity has another chance to shed old baggage and begin the world anew; carrying forward as much of the best of our heritage as possible and leaving the worst behind... [E]xploration and settlement of Mars is one of the greatest human endeavors possible in our time.... No nobler cause has ever been.”

## Another perspective....

“There is frequently a tendency to generalize ‘exploration’ into a universal expression of the human gene, to equate ‘discovery’ with ‘curiosity’ or with ‘human spirit.’ That it is, but not uniquely.... Exploration...appears to be a cultural invention.... Its vitality as an institution depends on the vitality of the whole civilization with which it interacts. To survey the motives for exploration is to survey all the motives that animate a thriving civilization.... The point is that exploration must share and participate in a moral universe with its civilization.

This is not a question of purpose so much as legitimacy. In this sense exploration is a shared act of faith. It reinforces and reinterprets in updated garb myths, beliefs, and archetypes basic to its originating civilization.”

Stephen Pyne, “The Third Great Age of Discovery,” *The Scientific and Historical Rationales for Solar System Exploration*, Space Policy Institute, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1988

## **“What is the Value of Space Exploration?”**

**A Symposium Sponsored by the Mission From Planet Earth Study Office, Office of Space Science, NASA HQ, 1994**

“What value have we gleaned from past exploration initiatives, and what is the real value of space exploration in the post-Cold War world? Does it enrich human existence? Fulfill a cultural imperative? Offer critical additions to knowledge? Enhance economic strength and technological competitiveness? Improve international relations? Advance education? Improve the quality of life? Feed spiritual needs?

Today, without a motive so compelling as...Cold-War competition...space exploration has no clearly defined purpose, critics say. Thus, the purpose of the symposium was to stimulate public discussion about the scientific, economic, and cultural value of space exploration in the post-Cold War world and expand the community of people participating in this discussion.”

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STEP 1:

Think strategically about communication.

## White paper for NASA transition team 2008

Thinking strategically about communication in an organization requires everyone in the organization to embrace communication as a crucial element of all of their activities.

Everybody has a contribution to make, in administration, management, budgeting, program planning and execution, safety and security.

## **NASA's Cold-War approach to communication:**

The propaganda model – winning “hearts and minds” to the cause of beating the Soviet Union.

## *The bullet model*

Top-down, one-way:

Develop message

Identify target

Deliver message to target



# **NASA's post-Cold-War approach to communication:**

Branding and marketing

“Selling” the space program.

“Engaging” and “exciting” “the public.”

Top-down, command-control approach.

Quantitative evaluation.

# Another approach...

Interactive, networked, participatory communication (dialogue)

Develop and sustain relationships

Build trust

Explain the space program: relevance, value, meaning vs. glamor, excitement, entertainment

# Conclusions

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## Until and unless NASA can:

- 1) Consult with “the people” about space exploration goals and objectives that are important to them and incorporate public input into its strategic planning process,
- 2) Balance political and public interests,
  - 1) Acknowledge and temper internal cultural biases and subcultural conflicts, and
  - 2) Jettison the branding-and-marketing strategy in favor of a more effective long-term communication strategy...

Then it will be difficult for NASA to develop  
a common, unifying vision....



In theory, it is possible for NASA to develop and deploy an effective communication strategy.

In reality, it may not be possible to accomplish this goal, given that NASA's "vision" changes shape every 4-6 years and at the same time is tightly linked to disputed ideologies (American exceptionalism, manifest destiny, laissez faire economics...), which has been widely critiqued.

The marketing approach to communication serves business well.

It has not served NASA well.

NASA is not a business.

NASA is accountable to citizens.

NASA needs to speak to meaning and value.

cool

bold

exciting

vision

threat

manned

colonization

frontier

destiny

