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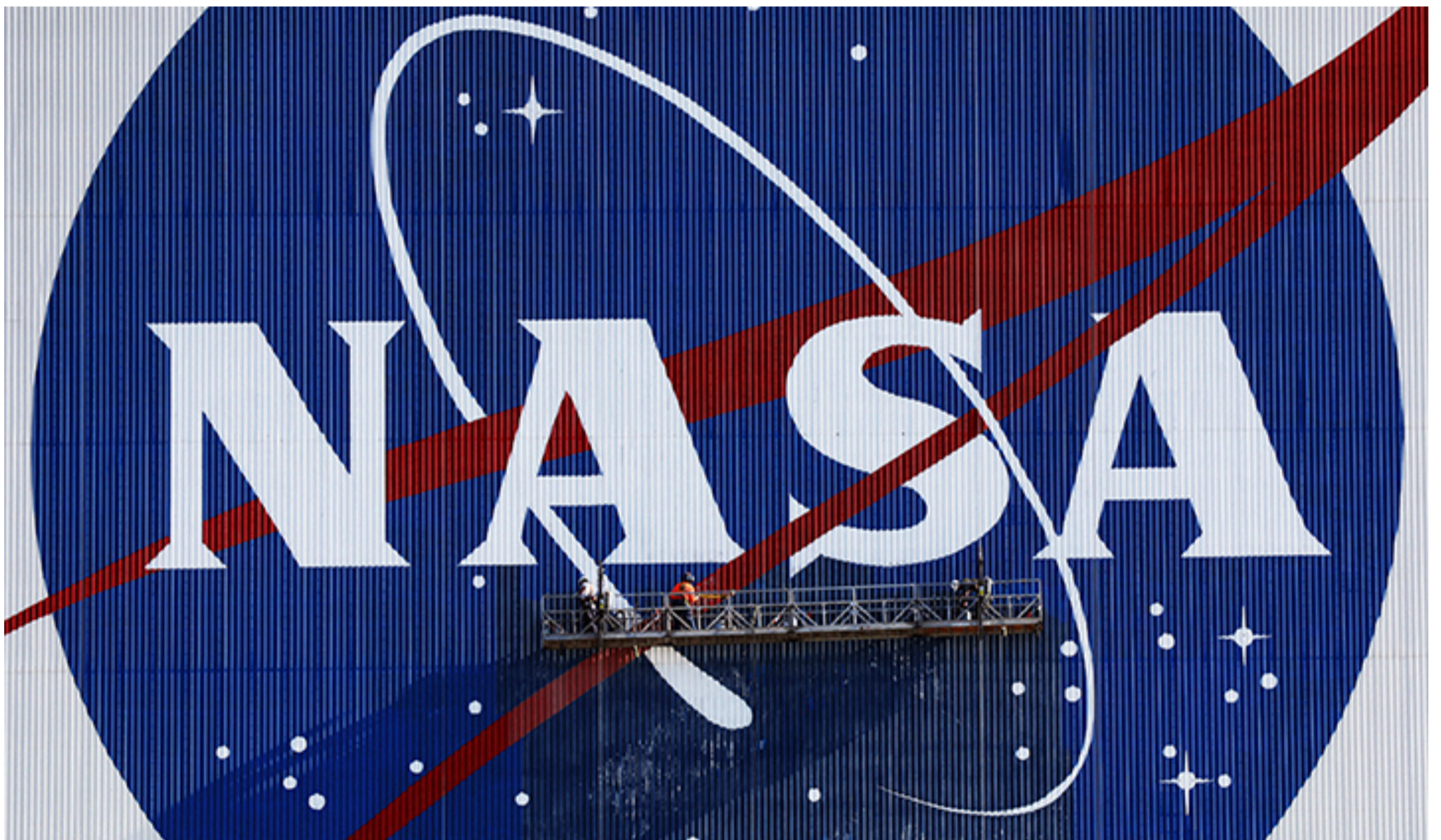
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SCIENCEINSIDER SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

## NASA ends support for planetary science advisory groups

Culling limits agency's ability to tap independent advice

20 JAN 2026 • 5:40 PM ET • BY PAUL VOUSEN



NASA is eliminating eight long-standing planetary science advisory groups. GREGG NEWTON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



After a [year of turmoil](#), NASA said it would end its financial support for the independent advisory groups that for decades helped guide the agency's research in planetary science. The decision, announced late Friday, would limit the agency's ability to draw on outside advice while also blocking a public window into NASA's operations.

The move to end financial support, which included funding for annual in-person meetings, travel, and websites, was announced in a letter from Louise Prockter, NASA's Planetary Science Division director. The letter [extolled](#) the virtues of the groups, made up of volunteers including scientists at universities and NASA centers. They "have fostered collaboration, built consensus, and strengthened ties," Prockter wrote. But, she added, presidential executive orders and a tight budget made it impossible for the agency to continue to support the groups.

Each advisory group specializes in a part of the Solar System: Mars, Venus, small bodies such as asteroids, and more. At the time of the letter, NASA had eight such groups. Meeting several times a year, mostly virtually, the groups are open to all, and the regular briefings NASA officials gave often served as the first public notice of new scientific results or problems with spacecraft.

NASA had eliminated its formal scientific advisory committees last year, following a [broader purge](#) by the White House across the federal bureaucracy. But the planetary groups were never part of this apparatus. They could not make formal recommendations to NASA—but they were also nominally free of federal control.

Leaders of the advisory groups had privately heard from NASA for months that their existing funding was unsustainable, says Amy Fagan, a planetary scientist at Western Carolina University and chair emeritus of the [Lunar Exploration Analysis Group](#) (LEAG). Still, she was heartbroken and cried when she got the news. Those were “tears for the community and what it will lose, but also tears for our headquarters colleagues faced with having to make this decision,” she says. But she also says many researchers are resolved to find ways to keep the groups going. “We are a scrappy bunch, and we will find a way for our communities to carry on.”

The groups often gave NASA a way to quickly sound out scientists. For example, in 2022, a delay in the launch of the Psyche spacecraft caused a budget crunch that threatened a mission to Venus called [Veritas](#). NASA’s planetary science director at the time asked all the groups whether they wanted the agency to keep supporting Veritas or solicit a new mission. The groups unanimously supported Veritas, and the subsequent NASA budget request included funding to revive the mission, says Victoria Hamilton, a planetary scientist at the Southwest Research Institute and chair of the [Mars Exploration Program Analysis Group](#) (MEPAG). “That kind of direct insight is going to be much more difficult for NASA to obtain now.”

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The groups also helped shape plans for human exploration. LEAG has helped guide the science goals of the Artemis program to return astronauts to the Moon, Fagan says. Meanwhile, MEPAG has for 25 years maintained a running list of scientific priorities for Mars, including research that could be done by humans when they arrive.

In February 2025, NASA told the advisory groups to pause their activity until the Lunar and Planetary Institute, the contractor handling the grant for the advisory groups, ensured they were following the administration’s executive orders, including termination of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The groups’ websites were taken down and restored months later after documents that [mentioned DEI were removed](#).

Prockter’s announcement holds out hope that NASA could still fund planetary science workshops through competitive grants. But the competitions could end up pitting the different communities against each other, Fagan says. And the proposals would take months to crawl through the grant pipeline, Hamilton says. “That’s the opposite of efficiency.”

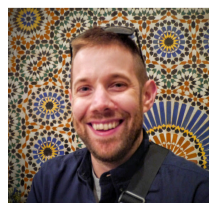
Although planetary science had the best known advisory groups, about 10 similar advisory groups operate within NASA’s other scientific divisions, devoted to topics such as exoplanets and earth science data. Their fate is not yet clear; NASA did not respond to a query from *Science* before publication.

doi: 10.1126/science.zlo4ne3

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