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Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

August 12, 2026

Accessible Version

The Honorable Jared Isaacman
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 Hidden Figures Way SW
Washington DC 20546

Priority Open Recommendations: National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Dear Administrator Isaacman:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ NASA's recommendation implementation rate was 72 percent. As of July 2026, NASA has 46 open recommendations, including four priority recommendations.² Since our August 2025 letter, NASA has not implemented any priority recommendations.³ Fully implementing these open priority recommendations could significantly improve NASA's operations.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

- **Monitoring program costs.** NASA needs to improve transparency into Artemis program and mission costs. Artemis missions, which aim to return astronauts to the moon and eventually Mars, are composed of some of NASA's most expensive and complex projects. We [recommended](#) that if NASA continued to fly the Space Launch System Block I beyond the first two missions, it should establish separate life-cycle cost and schedule baseline estimates for those efforts, to include funding for operations and sustainment, and report this information annually to Congress via the agency's budget submission. At the mission level, NASA has not taken steps to create a life-cycle cost estimate for the Artemis III mission,

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: National Aeronautics and Space Administration*, [GAO-25-108199](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 28, 2025). In this letter, we identified three priority recommendations. Since then, we added one new priority recommendation.

which was planned to be the program's first lunar landing, as we [recommended](#) in December 2019. This is important as NASA plans for its mission to return U.S. astronauts to the surface of the moon in 2028. A life-cycle cost estimate would provide transparency into the cost of the programs necessary to execute the mission. Cost estimates provide management with critical cost-risk information to improve the control of resources as NASA plans to invest billions of dollars in the coming years to support human spaceflight and exploration. If the Artemis program experiences cost and schedule growth, it could have a cascading effect on NASA's portfolio.

- **Managing cybersecurity risks.** Spacecraft and space systems are operating in a cyber threat environment with increased risks of attack and mission disruption. Developing, implementing, and maintaining a comprehensive cybersecurity risk management program is critical to protecting NASA's systems and information, detecting suspicious activity, and responding to incidents. One of the key activities related to implementing a cybersecurity risk management program is preparing an organization-wide cybersecurity risk assessment, which we [recommended](#). A documented organization-wide risk assessment is essential to identifying and mitigating the highest priority cyber threats across the enterprise. Without such an assessment, NASA is less likely to be able to identify relevant threats and internal and external vulnerabilities, determine the impact if these threats and vulnerabilities are exploited, and ascertain the likelihood that harm will occur.
- **Using federal contracting metrics.** Using a balanced set of performance metrics, including both process- and outcome-oriented measures, can help federal agencies identify improvement opportunities, set priorities, and allocate resources. We found that the use of outcome-oriented performance metrics to manage procurement helps organizations determine whether they are achieving desired outcomes, such as reducing costs and improving performance. In July 2021, we [recommended](#) that NASA use a balanced set of performance metrics to manage the agency's procurement. Using such metrics to manage the agency's procurement organizations would position NASA to make more informed management decisions and potentially save millions of dollars.

Two of these areas—monitoring program costs and cybersecurity—are also included on GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ Several other government-wide high risk areas have direct implications for NASA and its operations, including strategic human capital management and managing federal real property. We have also identified actions NASA should take to reduce the cost of government operations. For example, we [reported](#) that NASA and other federal agencies were affected by restrictive software licensing practices, including vendor processes that limit, impede, or prevent agencies' efforts to use software in cloud computing. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status, can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁵ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

⁴This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

⁵We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Timothy J. DiNapoli, Managing Director, Contracting and National Security Acquisitions, at dinapolit@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

cc: Amit Kshatriya, Associate Administrator and Chief Engineer, NASA
Dr. Lori Glaze, Associate Administrator, Human Spaceflight Mission Directorate, NASA
Sean Gallagher, Chief Information Officer, NASA
Bradley Niese, Senior Procurement Executive, Deputy Chief Acquisition Officer, and
Assistant Administrator for Procurement, NASA

for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.