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TRACKING THE FUNDS:

Specific Fiscal Year 2022 Provisions for National Aeronautics and Space Administration

GAO-22-105921 · September 2022
Report to Congressional Committees

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 appropriated \$22.7 million to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for 21 projects at the request of Members of Congress. The act includes specific provisions that designate an amount of funds for a particular recipient, such as a nonprofit organization or a local government, to use for a specific project. These provisions are called “Congressionally Directed Spending” in the U.S. Senate and “Community Project Funding” in the House of Representatives. Members of Congress had to meet certain requirements under Senate and House rules in order to have their requests included as provisions in the act. Such requirements included that Members post requests online and certify that they had no financial interest in the projects. The House also required Members to demonstrate community support for requests.

This report examines how NASA intends to identify the provisions, distribute the funds made available through these provisions, and ensure the funds are spent for the purposes Congress intended. For more information on this report and others in this series, including background and methodology, visit <https://www.gao.gov/tracking-funds>.

What are the intended uses of these funds?

The \$22.7 million is intended to expand educational capabilities, upgrade exhibits and equipment at science museums and learning centers, and support space-related research projects.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration: Fiscal Year 2022 Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending Provisions

Subunit	Budget account	Number of fiscal year 2022 provisions	Percentage of budget account designated for fiscal year 2022 provisions ^a	Examples of projects
\$22.7 million → Mission Support Directorate	Safety, Security, and Mission Services	21	1%	Upgrades to exhibits at science museums and support for space-related research

Source: GAO analysis of Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 and accompanying joint explanatory statement; and information provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. | GAO-22-105921

^aBased on total amount appropriated for this budget account for fiscal year 2022.

Who are the designated recipients?

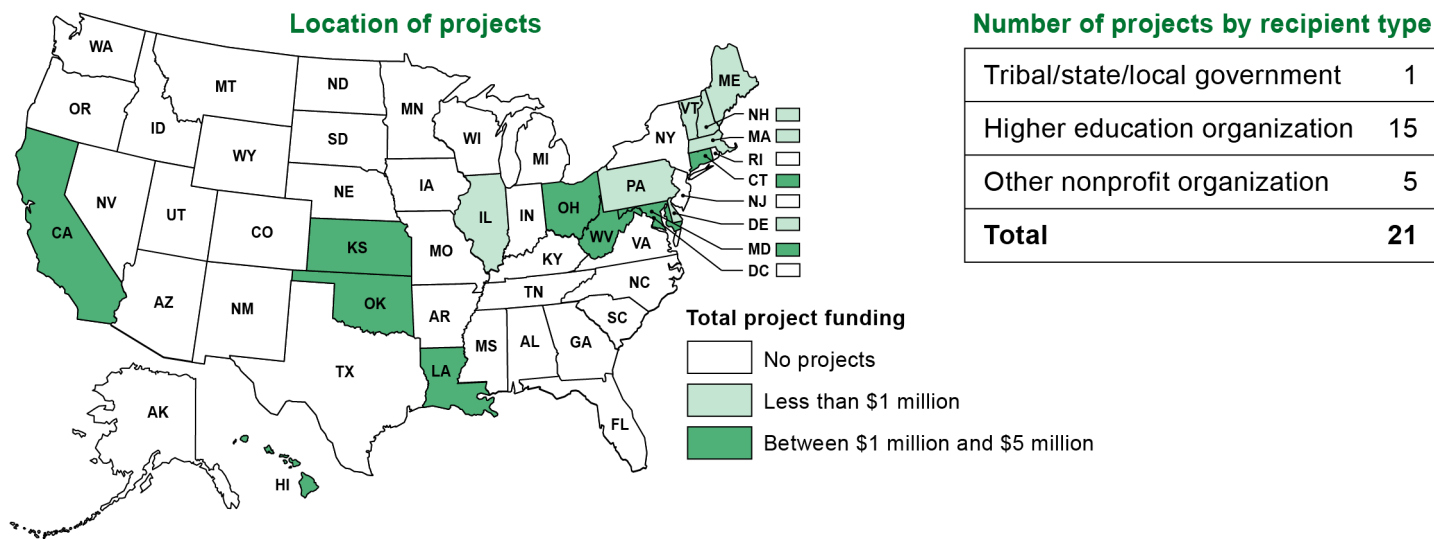
The designated recipients of funds for the 21 projects are generally higher education and other nonprofit organizations.

Key Observations

- Two-thirds of the recipients are higher education organizations, including one university that received funding for two projects. The remaining recipients are other nonprofit organizations—including museums—and one local government entity.
- Funding for projects ranges from \$70,000 for a learning center at a community college in Pennsylvania to \$5 million for aerospace systems and technology development at a university in Louisiana.
- About half of the projects will receive less than \$1 million, and the other half will receive \$1 million or more.

- More than half of the recipients have not previously received financial assistance from NASA, according to NASA officials.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration: Distribution of Fiscal Year 2022 Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending Provisions



Sources: GAO analysis of Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 and accompanying joint explanatory statement; and information provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Map Resources (map). | GAO-22-105921

Who within the agency will be responsible for identifying and monitoring these funds?

NASA officials told us a multidisciplinary group of officials would be tasked with identifying, distributing, and monitoring these funds.

- The Deputy Chief Financial Officer for Appropriations' office monitored appropriations legislation and reports to identify these funds and coordinated with congressional appropriations committees to obtain contact information for the designated recipients.
- The Mission Support Directorate will manage the distribution of these funds, with support from other relevant NASA offices.
- Grant and technical officers will administer and monitor the recipients' grants, which is how NASA will provide these funds to designated recipients.

How does the agency intend to ensure recipients are ready to receive and are able to use these funds?

NASA officials said they plan to use their standard grant process and guidance to ensure recipients are ready to receive and able to use these funds. For example, before recipients can receive their grants, NASA requires each recipient to submit a proposal outlining its plans for the funds. The proposal must include an application for federal assistance, a technical proposal for the project, and budget details, among other things. NASA will assess each proposal based on the project's merit and relevance to NASA's mission, the recipient's performance history, and relevant cost principles. NASA officials said they would work with recipients to address any shortfalls identified in the proposals.

NASA also plans to conduct a risk assessment for each recipient based on several administrative, financial, compliance, and performance factors to assess the recipient's ability to spend the funds. NASA will use the findings from the risk assessment to determine additional terms of the award, such as reporting requirements, and the level of post-award monitoring required.

How does the agency intend to ensure these funds are spent properly?

NASA officials said they plan to follow existing federal regulations for grants and use their standard grant monitoring process to ensure recipients spend these funds properly. This standard process includes actions that can help prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and improper payments. All of the recipients will be subject to NASA's routine monitoring activities, which at a minimum include annual and final performance reports, quarterly and final financial reports, and financial testing. In addition, NASA's standard monitoring process allows the agency to impose additional terms and conditions or monitoring requirements for recipients that NASA determines are high risk. For example, recipients may be required to submit performance reports on a more frequent basis, such as semiannually or quarterly. NASA may also conduct additional monitoring activities such as site visits.

Through these activities, NASA officials can track recipients' progress in achieving project goals and ensure timely use of funds. According to NASA officials, if they determine that recipients are performing at an unsatisfactory level, NASA can take several corrective actions, including temporarily withholding payments, fully or partially suspending projects, or terminating projects.

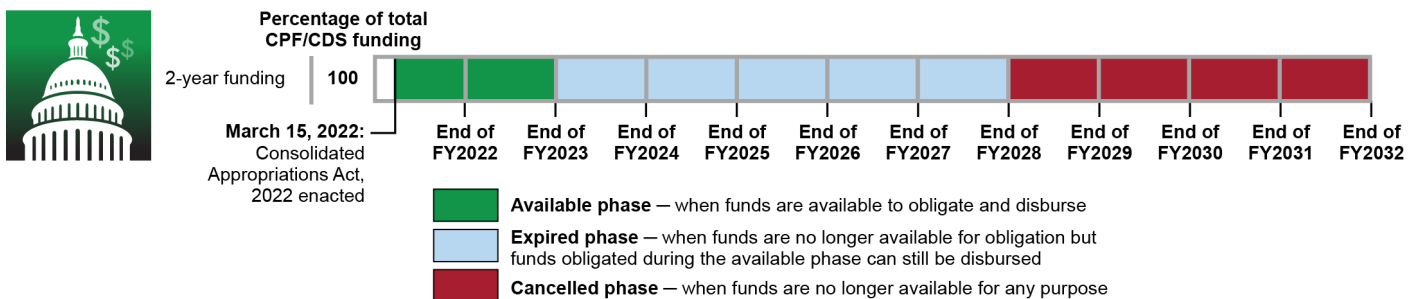
NASA officials told us that the Office of Inspector General is not involved in their standard grant monitoring process under existing federal regulations. However, if monitoring activities identify potential instances of fraud, waste, or abuse, NASA officials said they would share their findings with NASA's Inspector General and General Counsel for further investigation.

When does the agency expect recipients will have access to these funds, and when might funds be spent?

In August 2022, NASA officials said they had completed the process of awarding grants to all of the designated recipients. In advance of awarding these grants, officials said they would discuss each project's time frames with the designated recipients and determine when these funds would be spent. They said that some of the designated recipients had not anticipated receiving these funds and might need additional time to plan and implement their projects.

NASA has until the end of fiscal year 2028 to fully disburse the funds appropriated in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 to the recipients but may use its discretion to establish shorter periods for recipients to fully expend their funds (see figure below). For more information on the time availability of these funds, see [GAO-22-105467](#).

National Aeronautics and Space Administration: Appropriations Life Cycle for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending (CPF/CDS) Provisions



Source: GAO analysis of Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 and accompanying joint explanatory statement; 31 U.S.C. § 1552; and information provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. | GAO-22-105921

Note: While the phases depicted in this figure serve as general limitations for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's use of funds, officials said they entered into obligations for these projects by August 2022. For more information about the obligation and expenditure of these funds, see [GAO-22-105467](#).

What risks and challenges may the agency face distributing and monitoring these funds?

NASA officials identified two challenges related to these funds.

First, officials said some projects directed by these provisions might not clearly align with NASA's mission. To address this, NASA plans to evaluate each recipient's proposal for mission relevance and work with the recipient to align the project as closely as possible with NASA's mission.

Second, NASA officials said they had to reevaluate, reduce, or delay some agency-planned activities in order to make the funding specified in these provisions available for distribution to the designated recipients.

Why GAO did this study

The joint explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 includes a provision for us to review agencies' implementation of Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending. In addition to issuing this and other reports in this series, we will follow and review agencies' efforts to distribute, monitor, and audit these funds by sampling agencies and recipients and examining whether funds were spent as intended.

Agency comments

We provided a draft of this report to NASA for review and comment. NASA provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

GAO Contact

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We conducted this performance audit from May 2022 to September 2022 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Sources (cover image): NASA (Exploration Extravehicular Activity); Anton/dimazel/dottedyeti/stock.adobe.com (space background, Earth, and moon).

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