

National Aeronautics and Space Administration



Headquarters

Washington, DC 20546-0001

May 1, 2026

Reply to attn. of:

Office of Communications
History and Information Services Division

John Greenwald
The Black Vault

Re: FOIA Tracking Number **26-00374-F-HQ**

Dear Mr. Greenwald:

This is our final response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), dated January 4, 2026, and received in this office on January 5, 2026. Your request was assigned the above-referenced tracking number. You seek:

“Records that pertain to agency-level planning, policy, or procedural guidance addressing the detection, reporting, analysis, or response to the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence, extraterrestrial life, or non-terrestrial technological signals.

This request specifically includes, but is not limited to, the following categories of records:

Formal contingency plans, response plans, protocols, or procedural guidance addressing how NASA would respond to confirmed or credible evidence of extraterrestrial life, extraterrestrial intelligence, or extraterrestrial communication signals.

Policy documents, memoranda, directives, or guidance governing:

- Internal reporting requirements following detection of extraterrestrial signals or life*
- Coordination with other U.S. government agencies (e.g., the White House, OSTP, DoD, NSF, State Department) following such detection*
- Public affairs, communications strategy, or media coordination related to such events*
- Records referencing or implementing existing frameworks, including but not limited to:*
 - The “Declaration of Principles Concerning Activities Following the Detection of Extraterrestrial Intelligence” (SETI protocols)*

- *Any NASA-endorsed, NASA-adopted, or NASA-referenced international or interagency agreements or principles related to extraterrestrial detection or contact*
- *Emails, memoranda, briefing papers, or reports discussing the creation, revision, applicability, or relevance of any of the above policies or plans.*

In an email, dated March 9, 2026, you agreed to narrow your request to only include the search term “discovery comms protocol development” and limited the search custodians to: Becky McCauley Rench, Michael New, Mary Voytek, and Lindsay Hays.

In response to your request, we had NASA’s Offices of the Chief Information Officer and the Science Mission Directorate conduct the search of the email accounts of Becky McCauley Rench, Michael New, Mary Voytek, and Lindsay Hays using the search term “discovery comms protocol development.” Those searches identified records responsive to your request. We reviewed the responsive records under the FOIA to determine whether they may be disclosed to you. NASA considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing the records and applying the applicable exemptions. Accordingly, and after careful review of the records, NASA has determined that certain information contained therein should be withheld pursuant to U.S.C. § 552 (b)(5) and (b)(6). Below is an explanation of the information that has been withheld.

 8 page(s) are released in full (RIF);¹
 4 page(s) are released in part (RIP);

Exemption 5, 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5)

Exemption 5 protects “inter-agency or intra-agency memorandums or letters which would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the agency.”

5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5). Courts interpret Exemption 5 to incorporate three primary privileges: the attorney work-product privilege, the attorney-client privilege and the deliberative process privilege. NASA invokes the deliberative process privilege.

The deliberative process privilege is intended to protect the decision-making process of government agencies and to encourage frank discussion of legal and policy issues. The scope of the privilege covers documents reflecting advisory opinions, recommendations, and deliberations comprising part of a process by which government decisions and policies are formulated. To qualify for the deliberative process privilege, a document must be both “pre-decisional” and “deliberative.” Documents are pre-decisional when they precede an agency decision and are prepared in order to assist an agency in arriving at its decision. Documents are deliberative when they comprise part of the process by which government decisions are made. The types of records/information NASA withheld under this exemption consists of draft documents, analyses, recommendations and/or opinions expressed by employees. NASA considered the foreseeable harm that would result from the release of this information and determined that its release would hinder the decision-making process, create a chilling effect on internal deliberations, lead to uninformed decision-making, and public confusion.

¹ All page counts are approximate numbers.

Exemption 6, 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6)

Exemption 6 allows withholding of “personnel and medical files and *similar files* the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6) (emphasis added). NASA invokes exemption 6 to protect teams meeting phone numbers and passwords.

Fees

Provisions of the FOIA allow us to recover part of the cost of complying with your request. In this instance, because the cost is below the \$50 minimum, there is no charge.

Appeal

You have the right to appeal my action regarding your request. Your appeal must be received within 90 days of the date of this response. Please send your appeal to:

Administrator
NASA Headquarters
Executive Secretariat
ATTN: FOIA Appeals
MS 9R17
300 E Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20546

Both the envelope and letter of appeal should be clearly marked, “Appeal under the Freedom of Information Act.” You must also include a copy of your initial request, the adverse determination, and any other correspondence with the FOIA office. In order to expedite the appellate process and ensure full consideration of your appeal, your appeal should contain a brief statement of the reasons you believe this initial determination should be reversed. Additional information on submitting an appeal is set forth in the NASA FOIA regulations at 14 C.F.R. § 1206.700.

Assistance and Dispute Resolution Services

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at Alyssa.k.bias@nasa.gov. For further assistance and to discuss any aspect of your request you may also contact:

Stephanie Fox
FOIA Public Liaison
Freedom of Information Act Office
NASA Headquarters
300 E Street, S.W., 5P32
Washington D.C. 20546
Phone: 202-358-1553

Email: Stephanie.K.Fox@nasa.gov

Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services it offers. The contact information for OGIS is as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001, e-mail at ogis@nara.gov; telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

Important: Please note that contacting any agency official including myself, NASA's FOIA Public Liaison, and/or OGIS is not an alternative to filing an administrative appeal and does not stop the 90-day appeal clock.


Sincerely,

Alyssa Bias

Alyssa Bias
Government Information Specialist

This document is made available through the declassification efforts
and research of John Greenewald, Jr., creator of:

The Black Vault



The Black Vault is the largest online Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) document clearinghouse in the world. The research efforts here are responsible for the declassification of hundreds of thousands of pages released by the U.S. Government & Military.

Discover the Truth at: <http://www.theblackvault.com>

Subject: Discovery Comms Protocol Development
Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Start: Tue 6/3/2025 3:00 PM
End: Tue 6/3/2025 4:00 PM

Recurrence: (none)

Meeting Status: Accepted

Organizer: Scalice, Daniella M. (ARC-ST)[Amentum Services, Inc]
Required Attendees: Linda Billings; Grinspoon, David H. (HQ-DG000)
Optional Attendees: McCauley Rench, Becky (HQ-DG000); Allen, Tahira S. (HQ-NA000)[NCS]; Wasser, Molly L (HQ-NA020)[NCS]

Changing to 4pm on the 3rd re: David's email.

Hi all,

This is a meeting to work with Linda to develop ideas toward rough outlining of how an official communications protocol for a definitive discovery of ET life might look...

I'll send around some materials/thoughts Mary, Jim Green, and I developed awhile back on this.

Daniella.

Microsoft Teams [Need help?](#)

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: (b) (6)

Passcode: (b) (6)

Dial in by phone

(b) (6) United States, Huntsville

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: (b) (6)

For organizers: [Meeting options](#) | [Reset dial-in PIN](#)

ALERT: All meeting participants consent to, and will abide by, the terms and conditions viewable at the LEGAL link below. No ITAR/EAR content display or sharing without consent from Export Control.

[Org help](#) | [Privacy and security](#)

From: [Scalice, Daniella M. \(ARC-ST\)\[Amentum Services, Inc\]](#)
To: [McCauley Rench, Becky \(HQ-DG000\)](#); [Allen, Tahira S. \(HQ-NA000\)\[NCS\]](#); [Linda Billings](#)
Subject: Re: Discovery Comms Protocol Development
Date: Monday, June 2, 2025 10:06:23 AM
Importance: High

That's fine – let us know!

From: Grinspoon, David H. (HQ-DG000) <david.grinspoon@nasa.gov> on behalf of Scalice, Daniella M. (ARC-ST)[Amentum Services, Inc] <daniella.m.scalice@nasa.gov>
Date: Monday, June 2, 2025 at 9:04 AM
To: Scalice, Daniella M. (ARC-ST)[Amentum Services, Inc] <daniella.m.scalice@nasa.gov>, McCauley Rench, Becky (HQ-DG000) <rebecca.l.mccauleyrench@nasa.gov>, Allen, Tahira S. (HQ-NA000)[NCS] <tahira.s.allen@nasa.gov>, Linda Billings <billingslinda1@gmail.com>
Subject: FW: Discovery Comms Protocol Development

I may want to reschedule this, as things keep getting shuffled around today. (Just got called into another last minute all-hands) It's looking like 4 PM might be my only opportunity to meet up with our new intern who is starting here today...

From: daniella.m.scalice@nasa.gov
When: 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM June 2, 2025
Subject: Discovery Comms Protocol Development
Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Hi all,

This is a meeting to work with Linda to develop ideas toward rough outlining of how an official communications protocol for a definitive discovery of ET life might look...

I'll send around some materials/thoughts Mary, Jim Green, and I developed awhile back on this.

Daniella.

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Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life Communications Protocol Development

NASA Astrobiology Program

29 July 2020

Factors about the detection/discovery may occur along a spectrum:

Location:

near (in our Solar System)

far (exoplanets)

Organism:

microbial

humanoid

Biosignature:

chemical/molecular

“traditional” fossil

Levels of Readiness to consider in protocol development

Scientific Community

Data interpretation

Process

Time and space for rigor

Consensus?

The Public

Differences in socioeconomic, race, gender, education level, culture, faith, etc.

Ensure all have accurate information and support to make meaning of it

Cultivate a culture of celebration vs. fear

Why NASA?

NASA has been leading the scientific efforts to discover life beyond Earth since the 1950's; intensified with the advent of the Astrobiology Program in late 1990's

NASA is a globally-recognized brand known for space exploration on behalf of humanity.

The scientific processes NASA embodies and the communities it encompasses are expressive of key values:

- Pursuit of excellence
- Self-critique, evolution of thought
- Partnering, collaborating, and respecting diversity

What is NASA's Role?

The provision of accurate scientific information in an equitable way

Access to scientific expertise

Resources for interpretation/contextualization

Guidance for the comms protocol based in core values that guide science

Encouragement of healthy conversation and dialogue

Facilitators in a co-creative, meaning-making process across diverse communities

- Leadership toward celebration over fear-based responses

- Partners in creating and hosting fora for this process

- Engagement: surveys, events, town halls, etc.

Role/Value of the NASA Astrobiology Program

Leaders in the curation of the astrobiology scientific community; access to experts

Corporate knowledge and lessons learned (Viking, ALH84001)

Experience supporting the rigorous, iterative, scientific process around the detection/discovery

Long history of public engagement around life elsewhere in the Universe

Long history of efforts toward meaning-making of the detection/discovery

Relevant Work of the NASA Astrobiology Program

Scientific Contextualization

Workshops to develop/prepare scientific community

Ladder for Life Detection

NFOLD RCN

Meaning Making

NASA Astrobiology Debates

Center for Theological Inquiry

Blumberg Chair at Library of Congress

NASA and the Navajo Nation Partnership

AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion

Initial Guidance to Develop the Protocol

Protocol needs to be dynamic, responsive

What (b) (5) Deliberative Process Privilege ?

(b) (5) Deliberative ?

(b) (5) Deliberative Process Privilege ?

(b) (5) Deliberative ?

Protocol must be (b) (5) Deliberative Process Privilege :

(b) (5) Deliberative Process Privilege