



Highlights of [GAO-10-200](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) researchers generally disseminate their agency-funded research results through publications, presentations, agency releases, and media interviews. In 2007, GAO reviewed dissemination policies at NASA and two other agencies and found that NASA's policies were generally clear, but GAO's survey of NASA researchers raised concerns that many of them did not understand some of the policies and were generally unaware of how to appeal dissemination decisions. Congress in 2008 directed GAO to determine whether NASA is implementing its policies in a clear and consistent manner. To meet that requirement, GAO determined (1) what changes have been made to NASA's policies since 2007, (2) the views of NASA researchers on whether the policies have been more effectively communicated since 2007, and (3) what changes have occurred since 2007 in NASA's processes for researchers to follow if they wish to appeal decisions about the dissemination of their research results. GAO conducted a Web-based survey of all 2,790 NASA researchers and had a 57.5 percent response rate.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NASA include in its efforts to increase researchers' awareness of its policies a focus on the processes researchers are to follow when they wish to appeal decisions. In commenting on a draft of this report, NASA concurred with our recommendation.

View [GAO-10-200](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Ms. Anu Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov.

FEDERAL RESEARCH

NASA Should Better Inform Researchers about How to Appeal Dissemination Decisions

What GAO Found

Since May 2007, NASA has changed some of its policies on the dissemination of research results through publications and presentations, but has not changed its policy on dissemination through news releases and media interviews, although it has made a key leadership change in its main public affairs office. Regarding its policies for dissemination through publications and presentations, in 2007 and 2009, NASA clarified the roles and responsibilities of officials who participate in the review and approval process that is required before agency-funded research is released. The changes also required managers to notify researchers when their requests to release research results have been approved or denied, and they required researchers to refrain from releasing results until they received approval. In contrast, although NASA has not made any changes to its policy that guides the dissemination of research through the media, in May 2007, it converted a key management position in the Headquarters Office of Public Affairs from a political appointment to a career civil service position. This was done to address allegations that an official in this office had suppressed climate change science and denied media access to scientists during 2004 and 2005. The change resulted from a management review conducted in early 2006 by NASA's leadership looking into these allegations.

While the majority of researchers are familiar with the dissemination policies, GAO's survey indicates that in 2009, 87 percent of researchers were familiar with NASA's dissemination policies, compared with 92 percent in 2007, and slightly less were confident they understood the policies well enough to follow them for certain kinds of dissemination routes, such as publications, presentations, and agency releases. As in 2007, researchers continue to learn about the policies mainly through on-the-job training and e-mails from NASA officials. GAO's 2009 survey, like the 2007 survey, also indicates that researchers remain unclear about when they may discuss research results that have policy implications, including when they may discuss their own views, even though NASA has clarified its policy to allow researchers to do so as long as they do not attribute their views to the agency.

Since 2007, NASA has not adopted any new procedures for appealing dissemination decisions. As in 2007, in 2009 relatively few NASA researchers were aware of and familiar with the agency's appeals process. Specifically, GAO's survey found that about one-third of NASA researchers were aware that the agency has a process to appeal decisions related to dissemination, but only about 8 percent said they were familiar with it. Fewer researchers in 2009 than in 2007 said they had sought to disseminate their research in the past 5 years (83 percent compared with 91 percent), and more researchers had their requests denied for other than technical reasons (12 percent in 2009 compared with 7 percent in 2007). Nonetheless, 85 percent of researchers continue to believe that the agency generally supports the dissemination of research results and that the agency's efforts to inform them about policies for all dissemination routes are generally effective.