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ASCEND x Texas

INTERLOCKING ORBITS

Civilian, Commercial, and Defense

South Shore Harbour Resort & Conference Center
25–26 February 2026 | Houston, TX

PROGRAM GUIDE

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



AGENDA

WEDNESDAY | 25 FEBRUARY

1 p.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Clay Mowry, Chief Executive Officer, AIAA

Vanessa Wyche, Director, NASA Johnson Space Center

1:15 p.m.

Opening Keynote – NASA Today

Casey Swails, Deputy Associate Administrator, NASA

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1:35 p.m.

Keynote – From Sustaining LEO to Enabling the Moon – A Space Operations Update

Ken Bowersox, Associate Administrator, Space Operations Mission Directorate, NASA

2 p.m.

Business on Orbit: Challenges and Opportunities in Commercial LEO Destinations

MODERATOR: Eric Berger, Senior Space Editor, Ars Technica

PANELISTS:

Jonathan Cirtain, Chief Executive Officer, Axiom

Max Haot, Chief Executive Officer, Vast

Randy Lillard, Program Manager, Orbital Reef, Blue Origin

Marshall Smith, CEO, Starlab Space Stations

2:45 p.m.

Coffee Break Sponsored by



3:15 p.m.

Dual-Use Demand in LEO

MODERATOR: Camille Alleyne, CEO & President, Arusha Space

PANELISTS:

Dr. David Callaway, Chief, New Mission Development, DoD Human Space Flight Payloads Office, United States Space Force

Olivia Gámez Holzhaus, Founder and Chief Technology Officer, Rhodium Scientific

Josh Martin, Vice President, Government Affairs, Varda Space Industries

Steven Platts, Chief Scientist, Human Research Program, NASA

4:15 p.m.

Closing Keynote

Col. Omar Perea, USAF, Chief of Innovation and Prototyping for Operations Location, Space Systems Command

4:45 p.m.

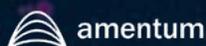
AIAA Special Announcement

5 p.m.

Opening Day Reception

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THURSDAY | 26 FEBRUARY

7:30 a.m.

Breakfast

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8 a.m.

Welcome

8:30 a.m.

Bridging Orbits: Transport & Support Systems for Exploration

MODERATOR: Monte Goforth, Acting Director, Business Development & Technology Integration, NASA Johnson Space Center

PANELISTS:

Kevin Au, Vice President, Exploration, Weather, Commercial Space Systems, Lockheed Martin Space

Nick Cummings, Senior Director, Government Systems Advanced Development

Pat Remias, Vice President, Advanced Concepts and Enterprise Engineering, Blue Origin

9:15 a.m.

Coffee Break

Sponsored by  BARRIOS

9:45 a.m.

Human Readiness for the Next Frontier

MODERATOR: Catherine Hofacker, Associate Editor, Aerospace America

PANELISTS:

Michelle Frieling, Director, Human Health and Performance Directorate, NASA Johnson Space Center

Thierry Klein, President, Bell Labs Solutions Research, Nokia Bell Labs

Dr. Kris Lehnhardt, MD, Director of Space Medicine, UTHealth Houston

Lucie Low, Chief Science Officer, Axiom Space

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10:45 a.m.

Systems to Outcomes: Integrated Mission Planning

MODERATOR: Jeff Foust, Senior Staff Writer, SpaceNews

PANELISTS:

Frank Acevedo, Increment Manager, International Space Station Program, NASA

Michael Lammers, Flight Director, NASA

Lynn Pickett, Program Manager for Human Health and Performance Contract, KBR

Debbie Wells, Vice President, Space Exploration and Mission Operations, Leidos

11:30 a.m.

Lunch

Sponsored by  Cimarron

12:30 p.m.

Keynote

Rep. Brian Babin (TX-36), Chair, House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, U.S. House Representatives

1 p.m.

Keynote – Optimizing Orbits

Dr. Greg Bonnen, MD, Chair, House Appropriations Committee, Texas House of Representatives

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1:30 p.m.

Thriving in Exploration: Xpanding Aerospace Synergies (Texas Strategic Initiatives)

MODERATOR: Brian Freedman, President, BAHEP

PANELISTS:

Norm Garza, Executive Director, Texas Space Commission

Gwen Griffin, Chair, Board of Directors, Texas Space Commission

Stephanie Murphy, Chair, Executive Committee, TARSEC

2:30 p.m.

Spotlight Update: The Texas Space Institute

PANEL LEAD: Robert Bishop, Vice Chancellor and Dean, College of Engineering, Texas A&M University; Director, Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station

PANELISTS:

Robert Ambrose, Associate Director, Texas A&M Space Institute

Jaret Matthews, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Astrolab

3 p.m.

Coffee Break

Sponsored by  ASTROLAB

3:30 p.m.

Texas as a Strategic Space Hub

Moderator: Jeff Foust, Senior Staff Writer, SpaceNews

PANELISTS:

Tim Crain, Chief Technology Officer, Intuitive Machines

Sassie Duggleby, Co-founder & CEO, Venus Aerospace

Shea Ferring, Chief Technology Officer, Firefly

Rob Meyerson, Co-Founder & CEO, Interlune

Kelly Page, President, Barrios

4:30 p.m.

Closing Keynote – Science: The Heart of Exploration

Eileen Stansbery, Former Chief Scientist, NASA Johnson Space Center (Retired)

5 p.m.

Reception

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19–21 MAY 2026 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

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ASCEND connects the civil, commercial, and national security space sectors, along with adjacent industries, to embrace opportunities and address challenges that come with increased activity in space. Join us for mission critical collaboration accelerating space commerce, exploration, and discovery by producing tangible outcomes to forge a sustainable off-world future – faster.

We look forward to seeing you in Washington, D.C., this May.

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