

ASCEND

19–21 MAY 2026 | WASHINGTON, D.C.

BUILDING OUR OFF-WORLD FUTURE

Forge the right partnerships | Explore breakthrough technologies | Turn insight into execution

EVENT RECAP

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 **AIAA**

THANK YOU

Our first-ever D.C. Space Week was remarkable. With new partners and an extensive speaker lineup, ASCEND delivered a memorable experience for our community. NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman opened the event by urging a standing-room-only audience to act with urgency in pursuit of the agency's bold new goals to establish a permanent human presence on the lunar surface.

The Institute was pleased to feature thought-provoking content throughout the week from our Founding Sponsor, Lockheed Martin, as well as our new event partners: BryceTech, Commercial Space Federation, International Space Station (ISS) National Laboratory, Space Force Association, Space Generation Advisory Council, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Novaspace, and The Aerospace Corporation. This report highlights many of the sessions they delivered.

The response to ASCEND's first Classified Day was overwhelmingly positive. Hosted by The Aerospace Corporation in Chantilly, Virginia, the event featured the Vice Chief of Space Operations, General Shawn Bratton, and National Reconnaissance Office Director Chris Scolese. We're looking forward to growing the national security dialogue at ASCEND 2027.

We were also encouraged by the inaugural Global Leaders Space Exploration Forum, held at the Embassy of Italy. This invitation-only half-day event fostered candid, high-level discussion among senior space leaders from around the world on the urgent need for durable frameworks for interoperability, safety, and long-term sustainability in low Earth orbit (LEO) and the cislunar domain.

By the numbers, ASCEND 2026 drew strong interest from the global aerospace community. We welcomed a record-setting 1,863 attendees from 24 countries, including over 400 students. With 24 exhibitors in the Expo Hall, 125 technical presentations at 28 sessions, and participation from over 60% of our Corporate Members, the event underscored our community's active involvement.

We celebrated professional excellence throughout the week. Our **Class of 2026 AIAA Honorary Fellows and Fellows** were recognized on the main stage following their official induction the previous evening. We also heard two prestigious lectures: the **2026 David W. Thompson Lecture in Space Commerce** by Tory Bruno and the **2026 von Kármán Lecture in Astronautics** by Maruthi Akella. We were honored to present several awards, including the **2026 AIAA Space Systems Award** to the Johns Hopkins APL Parker Solar Probe Team, the **2026 AIAA Distinguished Service Award** to Mark J. Lewis, and the **2026 AIAA Goddard Astronautics Award** to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

Many thanks to the members of the Guiding Coalition and Technical Program Committee. Your leadership made this event extraordinary. Support from our sponsors also enables aerospace knowledge exchange and strengthens the entire AIAA community—thank you.

Please enjoy this summary of ASCEND 2026 as we look ahead to next year 18–20 May 2027.

Let's sustain this momentum and continue building our off-world future together.

Clay Mowry
AIAA CEO



ASCEND 2026 brought new ideas, expanded partnerships, and a sharper focus while remaining grounded in AIAA's commitment to technical excellence and its role as a trusted home for the global space community. **With more than 300 speakers across more than 250 collaborative and technical sessions, ASCEND 2026 reflected the full scope of today's civil, commercial, and national security space ecosystem.**

ASCEND 2026 introduced new experiences and community events, including:

- › A **Classified Day** hosted by The Aerospace Corporation, convening cleared government and industry leaders for focused national security discussions.
- › The inaugural **Global Leaders Space Exploration Forum**, held at the Embassy of Italy in Washington, D.C., in partnership with the Lunar Policy Platform, bringing together senior policy and industry leaders to advance international partnerships on the future of exploration and the return to the moon.
- › Bryce Tech's first-ever **Start-Up Space Pitch Competition**, connecting promising early-stage companies with investors and technical experts.

Event partner organizations each contributed a dedicated content track and community:

- › **Commercial Space Federation (CSF)** — Two-day Commercial Space Policy Summit convened policymakers, congressional leaders, and government and industry stakeholders.
- › **The Aerospace Corporation** — Classified Day and Space Transformation Summit focused on long-term technological and strategic change.
- › **BryceTech** — Two-day Finance and Innovation program convened investors, innovators, and industry leaders through panels and a start-up pitch competition.
- › **ISS National Laboratory** — Three days of programming spanned microgravity science, cancer research, biomanufacturing, space healthcare, ISS commercialization, and the transition to commercial LEO destinations.
- › **Novaspace** — Sessions explored how D2D connectivity, cloud technologies, and AI are reshaping global space services.
- › **SGAC** — SGx program curated sessions and experiences for students and early-career space professionals.
- › **Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum** — Sessions focused on ISS heritage, preservation, recovery, and legacy.

The program covered the most pressing issues facing the global space community across five topic areas — **Space Economy, Policy and Law, National Security, Science and Exploration, and Technology Development and Utilization** — reflecting AIAA's commitment to multidisciplinary, rigorously vetted content:

- › Opened with plenary keynotes from **NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman, Brig. Gen. Nick Hague of the U.S. Space Force**, and the **Ambassador of India to the United States**, setting the strategic tone for the week.
- › Featured conversations with CEOs and decision-makers from leading government agencies, commercial operators, and research institutions, spanning Artemis, post-ISS transition, space domain awareness, and the future of U.S. space policy.
- › Spotlights founders, investors, and market analysts, exploring venture capital trends, start-up investment models, global market outlooks, and dual-use technologies.
- › Examined the evolving U.S. and international policy landscape addressing spectrum access, commercial remote sensing regulation, public-private partnership frameworks, and the legislative outlook from Capitol Hill and the White House.
- › Explored national space strategy through sessions on cybersecurity, missile defense, policy frameworks, and innovation trade-offs.
- › Addressed space medicine and human health through dedicated sessions and keynotes on optimizing human performance for commercial spaceflight, continuity of healthcare research, and the future of in-space medical capabilities beyond ISS.
- › Delivered technical sessions and paper presentations spanning space infrastructure, robotic exploration, space autonomy and AI, human-machine teaming, human health and performance, planetary science, systems engineering, and in-space resource utilization.
- › Featured interactive workshops, townhalls, and working sessions on lunar interoperability standards, space nuclear capabilities, in-space manufacturing, AI applications, and cislunar digital engineering.
- › Examined the cutting edge of the industry — from orbital data centers and space-based solar power to vLEO operations, artificial gravity, nuclear power, and the next generation of space infrastructure — and their role in defining the next era of space activity.
- › Explored international perspectives on space cooperation, market development, and strategic competition — including sessions on global supply chains, allied capabilities, and the geopolitics of the new space economy.
- › Invested in the next generation through SGx and student mentorship sessions, connecting emerging talent with senior professionals across the field.
- › Hosted Astrodebates, tackling the space community's most provocative and contested questions in live debate format.

Select sessions from ASCEND 2026 are available to watch on the AIAA YouTube channel.

youtube.com/@AiaaOrg



COMMUNITY OF INNOVATORS



1,863
Attendees



27
Exhibitors

24
Countries



6%
International



28
Technical Sessions



125
Paper Presentations

Top Companies and Employers Represented:

The Aerospace Corporation (59)

NASA (41)

Lockheed Martin (33)

Blue Origin LLC (12)

Voyager Technologies (12)

Axiom Space (11)

BryceTech (11)

Peraton (10)

Johns Hopkins University
Applied Physics Laboratory (10)

Boryung (10)

FAA/AST (9)

Northrop Grumman (8)

Commercial Space Federation (8)

Spectral Energies, LLC (8)

Vast (8)

Top Colleges and Universities Represented:

Georgia Institute of Technology (18)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (15)

University of Colorado – Boulder (13)

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor (11)

University of Maryland – College Park (8)

Embry-Riddle University – Daytona Beach (8)

Purdue University (8)

Texas A&M University – College Station (7)

George Washington University (7)

Stanford University (6)

University of Southern California (5)

Harvard University (5)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (5)

Old Dominion University (5)

Johns Hopkins University (4)

University of Florida (4)

University of Virginia (4)

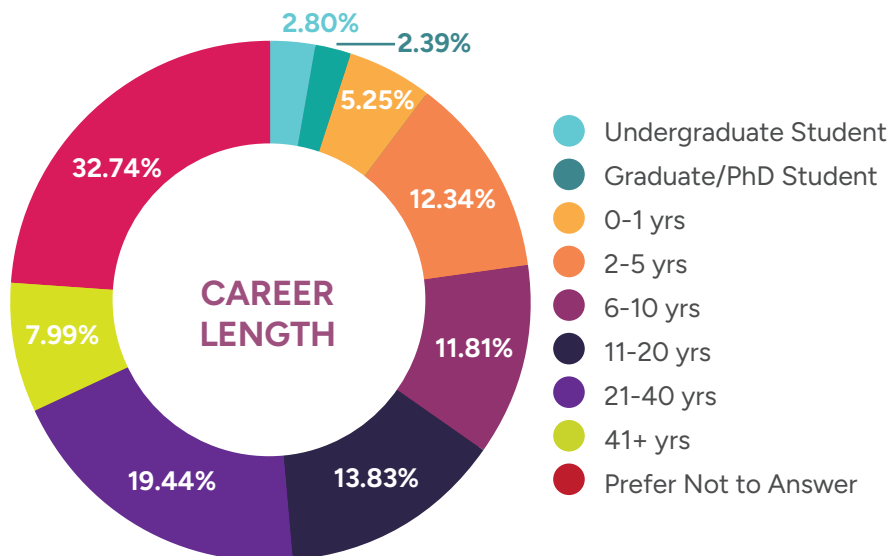
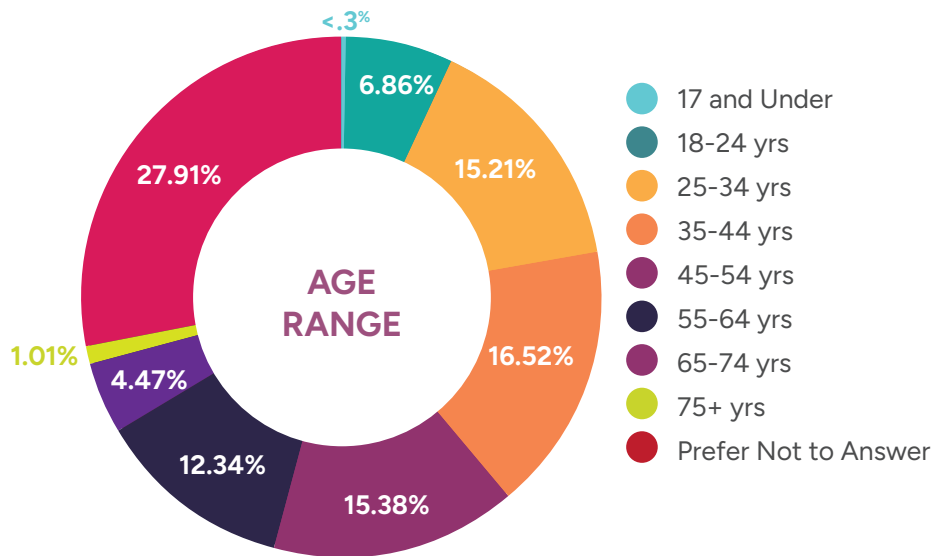
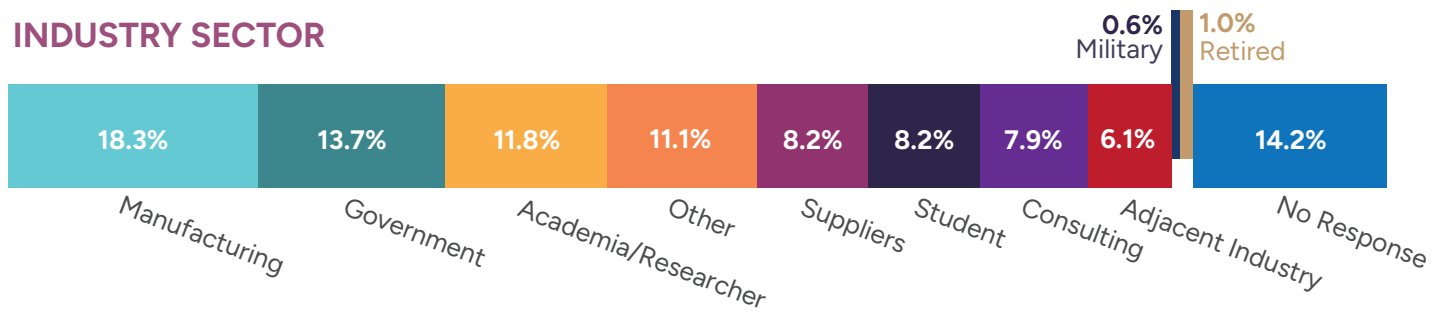
Stony Brook University (4)

University of California – Berkeley (4)

University of Houston – Central Campus (4)

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

INDUSTRY SECTOR



A LOOK AHEAD

ASCEND 2027 will build on the momentum of Washington, D.C., deepening the partnerships, programming, and community that make ASCEND the space industry's most important annual gathering.



SAVE THE DATE

ASCEND 2027

18–20 May 2027 | Washington, D.C.

Mark your calendars!

Registration opens late January 2027.

Partnership details will be announced in the coming months.



CALL FOR CONTENT

ASCEND 2027

Call for Content opens 21 July, inviting session proposals and technical paper submissions across all program tracks. Early engagement is encouraged. Visit **ascend.events** to learn more.



STAY CONNECTED YEAR-ROUND

ASCEND doesn't end when the event does.

Join the conversation through the **ASCENDxSeries** — including:

➤ **ASCENDxTexas** 24–25 February 2027

➤ **ASCENDxWebinars**

and subscribe for updates at **ascend.events**.

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NOVASPACE



SPACE GENERATION
ADVISORY COUNCIL

IMPACT & REACH



428,034

Overall Reach



18,718

Engagements
(4.37% engagement rate)



720

Social Media
Audience Growth



38

Credentialed Media

Social Media Influencer



RUHA TACEY

@futurecheme

Ruha lent her unique perspective and a fresh creative voice to the social media campaign, helping ASCEND 2026 reach new audiences and engage followers in an authentic, visually compelling way. Her contributions added meaningful depth to the mix of content and reflected the forward-thinking spirit at the heart of ASCEND.



Top Posts



MEDIA



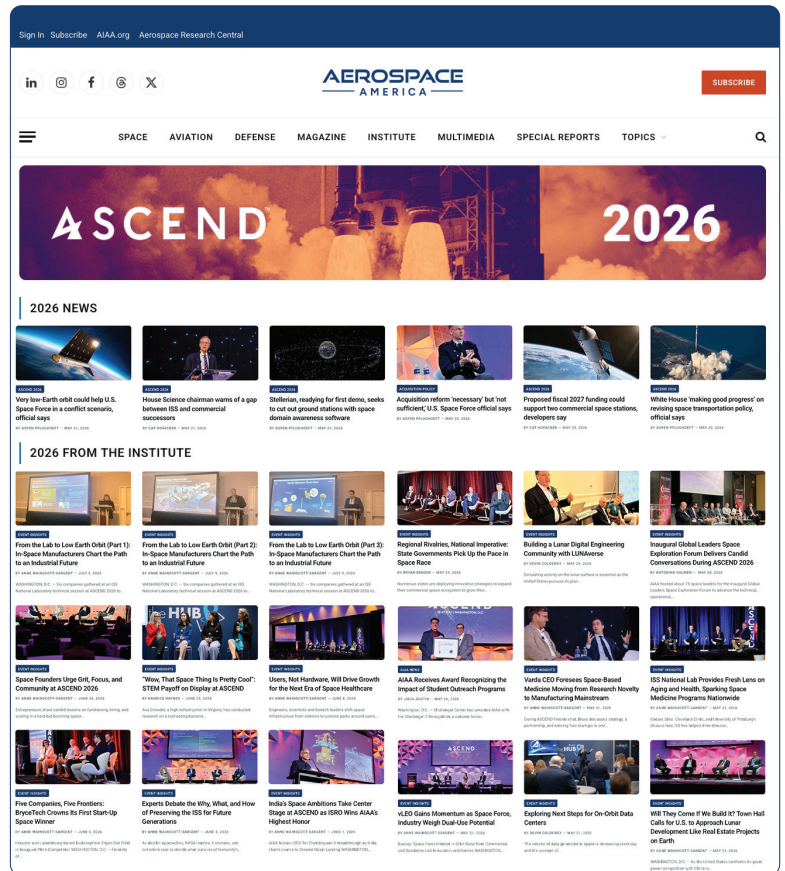
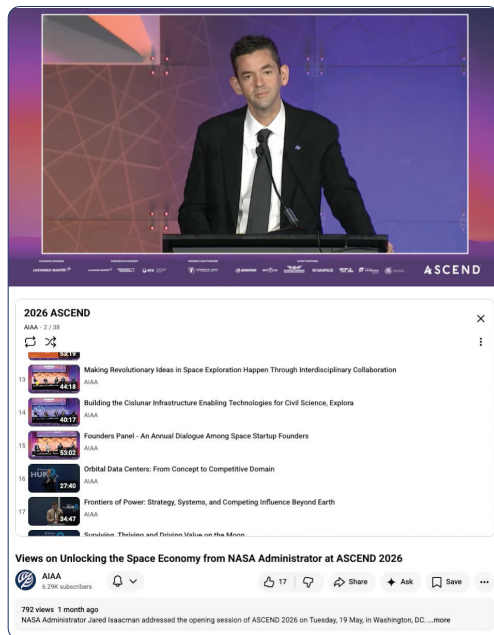
AEROSPACE AMERICA COVERAGE

The *Aerospace America* reporting team published news throughout the events. Writers from the AIAA Communications team published stories to chronicle the events in the From the Institute section.

Stories and videos are available here:
AIAA ASCEND coverage - Aerospace America.



Videos of the daily opening sessions, and other sessions throughout the event can be watched on demand on AIAA YouTube channel.



EXHIBITORS

Aegis Aerospace

Genargo S.r.l.

Snowclone Creative

AIAA National Capital Section

GITAL

Space Force Association

Ansys, a part of Synopsys

Glenair

Space Tango

Applied Aerospace & Defense

Harris Miller
Miller & Hanson Inc.

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Boryung

IMTS - The International
Manufacturing Technology Show

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BWXT

University of Central Florida
Foundation

Caltech CTME

ispace

Valcor Engineering

Experimental Sounding
Rocket Association (ESRA)

Lockheed Martin

Voyager Technologies

Fairfax County Economic
Development Authority (FCEDA)

Nullspace, Inc.

Yuri USA, Inc.

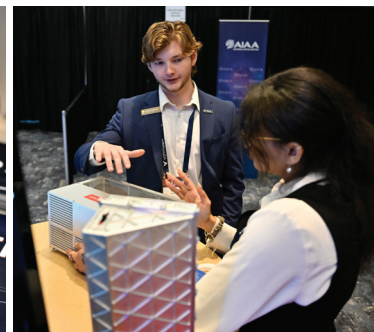
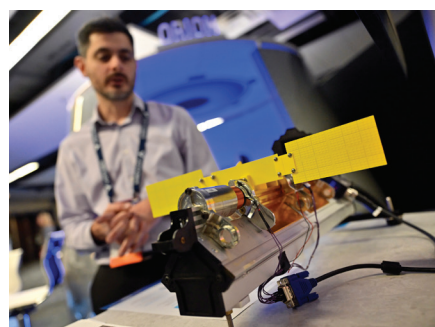
Polytec North America

RESERVED PRIVATE MEETING ROOMS:

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Machines
Redwire



RTX
Vast
Voyager
Technologies



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AIAA would like to thank the following organizations for their support of ASCEND 2026.

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NORTHROP GRUMMAN

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PRATT & WHITNEY
RAYTHEON

 **VOYAGER**

THE HUB

The HUB in 2026 delivered an exceptional lineup of engaging content. The dynamic sessions drew strong attendance and positive feedback from both attendees and exhibitors. Exhibitors specifically praised the HUB for boosting traffic and adding significant value to their participation.

Corporate Membership Took Center Stage

ASCEND 2026 attendees took notice of the prominent AIAA Corporate Member signage igniting conversations—and action—as companies left asking their leadership, “Why aren’t we a member yet?”



HUB sessions from
ASCEND 2026 are
available to watch on the



2026 ASCEND

AIAA - 19 / 38

- 16 **HUB** 27:40 Orbital Data Centers: From Concept to Competitive Domain AIAA
- 17 **HUB** 34:47 Frontiers of Power: Strategy, Systems, and Competing Influence Beyond Earth AIAA
- 18 **HUB** 31:59 Surviving, Thriving and Driving Value on the Moon AIAA
- 19 **HUB** 13:48 Space's Vision for Cis-lunar Economy AIAA
- 20 **HUB** 37:28 Our Future, Their Launch STEM, Inspiration, and the Off World Generation AIAA

Surviving, Thriving and Driving Value on the Moon

Unlisted



6,29K subscribers

0 0 Share Save ...

17 views 1 month ago

Presented by: The University of Central Florida
Professor Zaher Ali will moderate a discussion with Dr. Alain Barin, Dr. Greg Autry and Brett Mecum, Arizona Space Co. ...more



SEE YOU NEXT YEAR

ASCENDTM

18-20 MAY 2027 + WASHINGTON, D.C.

CALL FOR CONTENT OPENS 21 JULY 2026

ascend.events