



NASA SBIR 2008 Phase I Solicitation

01.07 Long Range Space RF Telecommunications

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): ARC, GRC

This solicitation seeks to develop innovative technologies for long-range RF telecommunications supporting the needs of space missions.

Purpose (based on NASA needs) and current state-of-the-art: Future spacecraft with increasingly capable instruments producing large quantities of data will be visiting the Moon and the planets. To support the communication needs of these missions and maximize the data return to Earth innovative telecommunications technologies that maximize power efficiency, transmitted power density and data rate, while minimizing size, mass and power are required.

The current state-of-the-art in long-range RF communications is about 2 Mbps from Mars using microwave communications systems (X-Band and Ka-Band) with output power levels in the low tens of Watts and DC-to-RF efficiencies in the range of 10-25%.

Specifications and Requirements:

- Ultra-small, light-weight, low-cost, low-power, modular deep-space transceivers, transponders, and components, incorporating MMICs and Bi-CMOS circuits;
- MMIC modulators with drivers to provide large linear phase modulation (above 2.5 rad), high-data rate (10 - 200 Mbps), BPSK/QPSK modulation at X-band (8.4 GHz), and Ka-band (26 GHz, 32 GHz and 38 GHz);
- High-efficiency (> 60%) Solid-State Power Amplifiers (SSPAs), of both medium output power (10 W - 50 W) and high-output power (150 W - 1 KW), using power combining techniques and/or wide band-gap semiconductor devices at X-band (8.4 GHz) and Ka-band (26 GHz, 32 GHz and 38 GHz);
- Epitaxial GaN films with threading dislocations less than 10⁶ per cm² for use in wide band-gap semiconductor devices at X- and Ka-Band;
- Utilization of nano-materials and/or other novel materials and techniques for improving the power efficiency or reducing the cost of reliable vacuum electronics amplifier components (e.g., TWTAs and Klystrons);
- SSPAs, modulators and MMICs for 26 GHz Ka-band (lunar communication);
- TWTAs operating at millimeter wave frequencies (e.g., W-Band) and at data rates of 10 Gbps or higher;
- Ultra low-noise amplifiers (MMICs or hybrid) for RF front-ends (< 50 K noise temperature); and
- MEMS-based RF switches and photonic control devices needed for use in reconfigurable antennas, phase shifters, amplifiers, oscillators, and in-flight reconfigurable filters. Frequencies of interest include VHF, UHF, L-, S-, X-, Ka-, V-band (60 GHz) and W-band (94 GHz). Of particular interest is Ka-band from 25.5 - 27 GHz and 31.5 - 34 GHz.

Research should be conducted to demonstrate technical feasibility during Phase 1 and show a path toward Phase

2 hardware and software demonstration and delivering a demonstration unit or software package for NASA testing at the completion of the Phase 2 contract.

Phase 1 Deliverables: Feasibility study, including simulations and measurements, proving the proposed approach to develop a given product. Verification matrix of measurements to be performed at the end of Phase 2, along with specific quantitative pass-fail ranges for each quantity listed.

Phase 2 Deliverables: Working engineering model of proposed product, along with full report of on development and measurements, including populated verification matrix from Phase 1.

The proposer to this subtopic is advised that the products proposed may be included in a future small satellite flight opportunity. Please see the SMD Topic S4 on Small Satellites for details regarding those opportunities. If the proposer would like to have their proposal considered for flight in the small satellite program, the proposal should state such and recommend a pathway for that possibility.