



STScI | SPACE TELESCOPE
SCIENCE INSTITUTE

EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF SPACE ASTRONOMY

Grants Allocation & Financial Review Committee

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Change in Grant Funding Allocation Procedure

- Through Cycle 3, funding for approved JWST grants was allocated via a Financial Review Committee (FRC) model, adopted from the Hubble Space Telescope (HST)
- The FRC model consists of:
 - U.S. investigators of approved proposals submit budget requests, with detailed justifications of their funding needs. No guidance is provided on funding breakdown. Teams estimate their funding needs
 - Budget requests are evaluated by the STScI Grants Office (GRA) and the FRC -- composed of expert members of the community
 - Budgets are evaluated for expense allowability, scope, **effort** and reasonableness
 - FRC members use their astrophysics and JWST data analysis expertise to recommend budget allocations for each request
- Following recommendation by the JSTUC and the JWST Grants Allocations Working Group, STScI changed the funding allocation procedure in Cycle 4 to a *formula* approach



New Grant Funding Allocation Formula Approach

- The new Funding Allocation Formula Approach* consist of:
 - STScI notifies each eligible investigator of a *not to exceed* funding amount for their approved program
 - Each eligible investigator requesting research support submits a budget, with a justification of how the funding will be spent. The total amount requested by all funding-eligible members of a proposal is *not to exceed* the STScI notified amount
 - Budget requests are reviewed by GRA and the FRC -- composed of expert members of the community
 - Budgets now are only evaluated for cost allowability, scope, and reasonableness (only flagged if egregious)
- The JWST Cycle 4 FRC (the first with budgets using the formula approach) was held on July 8-9, 2025, including members of the community and STScI staff to reduce workload

*For more details see [Cycle 4 Grant Funding Allocation Process presentation](#) in the March 2025 JSTUC meeting



Lessons learned

- The new formulaic approach makes the Community feel better guided on how much funding they can request
- The formulaic approach also reduces the workload of the FRC. However, with the elimination of work effort evaluations, the members of the FRC feel that their expertise is not being used.
- The *reasonableness* criterium generated substantial discussion, e.g. budgets failed to account for the contributions of the large numbers of non-US CoIs, failed to demonstrate a coherent link to the Phase I proposals, and in several cases included requests that were considered unjustifiable.
- FRC members expressed the reviews are no longer a good use of their time and that they will not continue to serve under this model going forward
- Some tension between the JSTUC/WG recommendations and the FRC feedback, with FRC members expressing that they still would like to be able to evaluate work effort



Lessons learned

How will budgets be reviewed in future cycles?

- Budgets still need to be evaluated for cost allowability, scope, and reasonableness, following Federal regulations
- Given the sentiment by FRC members about serving under the new review model, STScI will invest larger amounts of internal effort in the budget reviews. This will require re-prioritizing other work
- STScI staff would review expense allowability, scope, and reasonableness, but **not** work effort



Current Status of JWST Cycle 4 Grants Allocation

- The FRC reviewed budgets from 265 of 276 finding eligible programs in July 8-9, 2025. About 20% were flagged for discussion
- Letters regarding the funding status for JWST Cycle 4 programs reviewed at the FRC meeting were sent to Program Admin PIs on July 14, 2025
- 14 budgets were found to have out of scope or unallowable budget items. The PIs of those budgets will be asked to resubmit budgets reallocating funds
- 11 Programs did not submit compliant budgets on time and will be reviewed at a later date
- On August 25, 2025 Program Admin PIs were informed that STScI and NASA do not yet have any Cycle 4 funding, and there was not sufficient information to anticipate the eventual scope of that funding
- Cycle 4 funding will start to be distributed to PIs in December