INNER PLANETS
TERRAFORMING
ex omnibus opes

Who Funds the Settlement of Space? — In One Page

An open census of funding streams for space colonization, 2016–2026 · full report, data, and code published together

What we did. We built the first census of who funds planning for the human settlement of space, combining seven instruments: the full IRS registry of 1.97 million tax-exempt organizations (2,562 matched in this second edition, financials for all 1,275 that file them), the federal award record for NASA and DARPA (FY2017–2026), the NSF award database, program inventories of NASA, ESA, and DARPA, a classified inventory of university centers, a verified review of corporate and founder philanthropy, and — new in this edition — the grantee-level line items from IRS e-file XML for 63 targeted funders. Every total is a floor, and the streams must not be summed — a nonprofit's revenue is often federal money at a different station on its journey.

The money is real, and it is lopsided. Several billion dollars a year move through the measurable streams — but overwhelmingly into transport, spaceflight infrastructure, and destination science. The settlement-specific middle — making materials, food, and shelter from local resources — is a working minority interest: roughly $216 million of matched federal awards over the decade (NASA's ISRU and construction programs, DARPA's manufacturing and microbial-food work), against just ~$15 million a year of nonprofit revenue. Education and outreach take in ~$108 million a year — the field spends more inspiring future settlers than on most settlement problems themselves.

The empty row. How a settlement would govern itself — who owns what, what serves as money, how rules are made and enforced as a community grows from a crew into a town — has no dedicated funding stream anywhere we could look: about $10 million a year of nonprofit revenue (a third of it the young digital-community-governance cluster this edition adds — institutions for communities people can leave, not communities that cannot exit), $2 million of NASA awards in a decade, zero at DARPA, zero at NSF. The grant line items sharpen it: identifiable external funding of the governance organizations totals ~$1.8 million, through three funders. The gap is nearly empty rather than perfectly empty — a resource-governance game at Arizona State, a space-governance program at Indiana's Ostrom Workshop, an ethnographic project in Amsterdam — but together these are a handful of researchers, not a stream.

Corporations do not fill it. SpaceX operates no grant program and publishes no settlement research; the Musk Foundation lists space-exploration research as a purpose and funds essentially none; Blue Origin's Club for the Future made one $19 million round of gifts to advocacy groups in 2021 and now runs ~$450k a year of STEM outreach. The companies fund settlement R&D internally — a real stream, but one no public data can measure.

Gaps we checked and rejected. Space food beyond survival rations is funded (NASA's food challenges). ISRU is funded. The psychology of isolated crews is funded (NASA, ESA). The method returns "no gap" where money exists — which is why we believe it where it doesn't.

Our interest, disclosed. The Inner Planets Terraforming Foundation conducts research inside the largest gap this census identifies. That is why we searched hard enough to find it, and why every number ships with the data and code to check us.

Full report: Who_Funds_The_Settlement_Of_Space (second edition, 19 pp) · data release v1.1 (11 tables + manifest + changelog)