



NASA SBIR 2008 Phase I Solicitation

S5.01 Planetary Entry, Descent, Ascent, Rendezvous and Landing Technology

Lead Center: JPL

Participating Center(s): ARC, JSC, LaRC

NASA seeks innovative sensor technologies to enhance success for entry, descent and landing (EDL) operations on missions to Mars. This call is not for sensor processing algorithms. Sensing technologies are desired which determine the entry point of the spacecraft in the Mars atmosphere; provide inputs to systems that control spacecraft trajectory, speed, and orientation to the surface; locate the spacecraft relative to the Martian surface; evaluate potential hazards at the landing site; and determine when the spacecraft has touched down. Appropriate sensing technologies for this topic should provide measurements of physical forces or properties that support some aspect of EDL operations. NASA also seeks to use measurements made during EDL to better characterize the Martian atmosphere, providing data for improving atmospheric modeling for future landers. Proposals are invited for innovative sensor technologies that improve the reliability of EDL operations.

Products or technologies are sought that can be made compatible with the environmental conditions of spaceflight and the rigors of landing on the Martian surface. Successful candidate sensor technologies can address this call by:

- Providing critical measurements during the entry phase (e.g., pressure and/or temperature sensors embedded into the aeroshell);
- Improving the accuracy on measurements needed for guidance decisions (e.g., surface relative velocities, altitudes, orientation, localization);
- Extending the range over which such measurements are collected (e.g., providing a method of imaging through the aeroshell, or terrain-relative navigation that does not require imaging through the aeroshell);
- Enhancing the situational awareness during landing by identifying hazards (rocks, craters, slopes), or providing indications of approach velocities and touchdown;
- Substantially reducing the amount of external processing needed to calculate the measurements; and
- Significantly reducing the impact of incorporating such sensors on the spacecraft in terms of volume, mass, placement, or cost.

For a sample return mission, rendezvous technologies for capture of an Orbiting Sample (OS) with the return spacecraft:

- Remotely actuated mechanisms for automated OS capture;
- Optical and contact sensors.

For a sample return mission, monitoring local environmental (weather) conditions on the surface just prior to Planetary Ascent Vehicle (PAV) launch, via appropriate low-mass sensors.

Proposals should show an understanding of one or more relevant science needs, and present a feasible plan to fully develop a technology and infuse it into a NASA program.