



James Free
Associate Administrator
Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate
NASA

James Free was selected as the associate administrator for the Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate at the agency's Headquarters in Washington by NASA Administrator Bill Nelson on Sept. 20, 2021.

At the time of Free's appointment, NASA also announced the directorate leading all the agency's human spaceflight operations would separate into two areas. Free will lead a new directorate the agency is establishing, as well as work closely with the Space Operations Mission Directorate.

Free is a formerly retired NASA civil servant who has spent the past few years in a variety of private sector roles including most recently chief operating officer and senior consultant for Lead Off the X. Prior to his work at Lead Off the X, he served as senior vice president of Aerospace Systems at Peerless Technologies.



He retired from NASA in 2017, most recently serving as the agency's deputy associate administrator for technical for the Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate. He was responsible for assisting the associate administrator in providing strategic direction for all aspects of NASA's human spaceflight exploration mission. In that role, Free provided cross-agency support functions of space communications and rockets, including direction for the operation and use of the International Space Station, development of the Space Launch System and Orion spacecraft, and direction for the commercial crew and cargo programs that provide logistics and crew transportation to the station.

Free began his NASA career in 1990 at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, as a propulsion engineer and later as a systems engineer on several spacecraft. He served in a variety of positions at Johnson Space Center in Houston and Glenn Research Center in Cleveland. Free worked on various projects and programs spanning everything from the International Space Station and electric actuation technologies, to the Orion and Prometheus spacecraft.

He went on to serve as deputy director before his appointment as the Glenn director, where he was responsible for planning, organizing, and directing the activities required in accomplishing the missions assigned to the center.

A native of Northeast Ohio, Free earned his bachelor's degree in aeronautics from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and his master's degree in space systems engineering from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

Free is the recipient of the Presidential Rank Award, NASA Distinguished Service Medal, NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, NASA Exceptional Service Medal, NASA Significant Achievement Medal, and numerous other awards.