The PAD is Back

by Dale Myers

Deputy Administrator of NASA

NASA has, since its inception, welcomed the opportunity to carry out programs and projects. Some of these have been technologically and managerially challenging, and NASA has evolved management processes to assist in the documentation and tracking of major program milestones and resources utilization. As part of these processes, the Program Approval Document (PAD) was introduced during the 1960s to record the authorization of newly approved agency projects. The document, prepared at a summary level, outlined the technical plan, number of launches, project costs and key milestones for management review. The PAD was intended to be a contract between the Program Associate Administrator and the NASA Administrator on the content, schedule, controls and resources of each project and was usually updated annually to reflect major changes. In the early 1970s, the PAD became an even more powerful document, changing from a budget orientation to a management one. The Administrator began to use the PAD to identify items and milestones he deemed critical to the orderly progression of the program and to make such items Administrator-controlled. In other words, once he and the Program Associate Administrator agreed to the critical items or milestones, they could not be changed without the Administrator's approval.

The use of the PAD as a management document declined in recent years, and the requirement for PADs was canceled in 1985. When I assumed the Deputy Administrator position, I became aware that there was nothing in the system that documented program agreements made between the Administrator and the Program Associate Administrators. I was very concerned that the documentation and control which the PAD had provided the Administrator no longer existed, and I soon began the process to reinstate the PAD.

First, the new PAD had to be a management document. It would indeed be the fundamental contract between the Administrator and Program Associate Administrator, and it would codify those critical items that could not be unilaterally changed.

Second, the PAD would contain significant resource information and program milestones that would become part of our monthly program and project reporting process.

Third, the PAD would be concise. We do not need additional paper in the system.

Finally, we would apply the PAD requirements selectively, not blanket all NASA programs and projects with unnecessary documentation. The PAD would apply only to those projects the Administrator deemed necessary.

During the past year we have piloted the application of the PAD to a number of programs and will shortly have 20 or so signed PADs. In the very near future we will publish a NASA Management Issuance, officially bringing the PAD back. I think this is a very positive step in the management and control of our programs and projects, since it represents the prime objective to be met by the Associate Administrators in their area of program management.