

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105147](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Statute generally requires that a portion of the U.S. allocated research capacity be guaranteed to experiments on the national laboratory for non-NASA users like commercial entities. CASIS is responsible for selecting which non-NASA users can use the laboratory. In 2019, NASA commissioned an independent review that identified various challenges at CASIS, including poor communication with the user community.

GAO was asked to review CASIS and NASA activities related to the laboratory. Among other objectives, this report assesses the extent to which CASIS obtains input from and provides information to laboratory users.

GAO reviewed documents such as the cooperative agreement between NASA and CASIS and their operating principles. GAO also interviewed the chairs of CASIS's user advisory committee and its five subcommittees, and officials from NASA and CASIS.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to NASA, including that it ensures CASIS (1) obtains input from its user advisory committee about resource allocation decisions, (2) takes steps to agree upon needed information about past allocations, and (3) provides the committee more information about planned resource allocations. NASA agreed with the first two recommendations, and partially agreed with the third, noting challenges with providing the flight queue. GAO continues to believe NASA has opportunities to provide additional information, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-22-105147](#). For more information, contact W. William Russell at (202) 512-4841 or russellw@gao.gov.

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INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

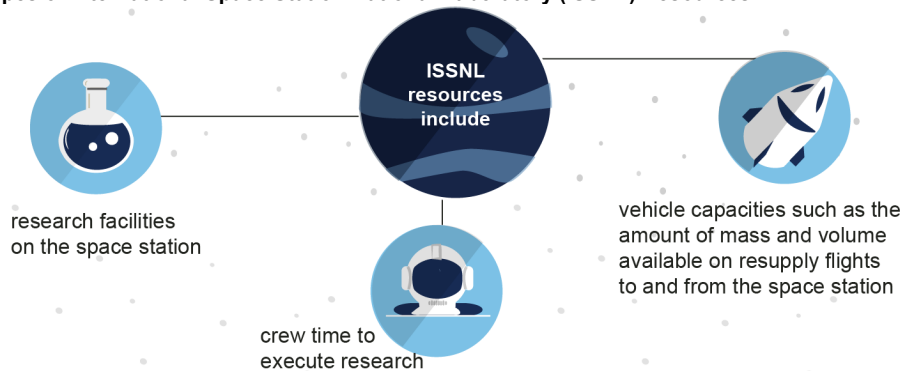
Opportunities Exist to Improve Communication with National Laboratory Users

What GAO Found

The Center for the Advancement of Science in Space (CASIS) manages the International Space Station National Laboratory through a cooperative agreement with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). NASA is responsible for providing performance feedback to CASIS.

In November 2020, CASIS formed and staffed an advisory committee of laboratory users, such as academic researchers, with prior experience working with the space station to inform planning for and use of laboratory resources (see figure).

Types of International Space Station National Laboratory (ISSNL) Resources



Source: GAO analysis of Center for the Advancement of Science in Space documentation. | GAO-22-105147

CASIS officials have not obtained input from the advisory committee on how to allocate laboratory resources, even though the committee is chartered to advise CASIS on resource utilization. CASIS officials stated they have not obtained this input for several reasons, including that the committee is unlikely to provide a consensus perspective. However, a lack of consensus does not preclude communication. Diverse input could enhance CASIS's understanding of risks and opportunities across the laboratory portfolio.

Additionally, CASIS has not routinely provided the advisory committee information about past and planned resource allocations, including visibility into the flight queue for projects waiting to travel to the International Space Station. The chairs of the advisory committee and its five subcommittees told GAO they could more effectively advise CASIS if they had more information about past resource allocations. These members also stated that greater transparency into planned allocations would be valuable for users conducting time-sensitive research—such as biological science research involving cell and tissue samples. CASIS officials said they have not routinely provided the committee this information because the resource allocation process is complex and fluid. However, NASA and CASIS officials acknowledged laboratory users would benefit from improved visibility into the resource allocation process.