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The Mars Program Planning Group's Evolving Conversation

NASA's Mars Program Planning Group (MPPG) had a driving purpose: to develop options for a program-level architecture for robotic exploration of Mars that is consistent with the President's challenge of sending humans to Mars orbit in the decade of the 2030s, yet remain responsive to the primary scientific goals of the 2011 NRC Decadal Survey for Planetary Science. This means investing in a number of different initiatives including spaceflight, ground-based investigations, key technologies and more.

But the MPPG also wanted a way to engage and inform the public about the progress of Mars exploration, so as the program proceeded and the landing of the Curiosity Rover drew near, the MPPG launched an idea forum using IdeaScale technology where users could ask questions and share ideas related to Mars exploration.

The level of engagement on the new Mars Forum was impressive:

- Nearly **1,300 citizens signed up** to ask questions and share ideas, resulting in a **total 559 submissions in just three months**.
- A key learning was that **the public expects humans to explore Mars in the future** (4 of the top 10 ideas related to a human presence on Mars including questions about a permanent settlement and terraforming opportunities).
- Not only did visitors make suggestions, they **asked and answered questions**, generating ongoing conversations.
- The Mars Forum responded by generating some new, rich content of its own for users, including a highly-developed 30-question-deep answer page based on Mars Forum content.
- **Additionally, the MPPG generated a new video page in which Mars experts weighed in on Mars Forum hot topics in twelve original videos**, to further enrich and evolve the conversation.

In the future, the MPPG hopes to engage the public even more deeply in Mars exploration (possibly in data analysis, brainstorming, coding, and more). That means future missions will continue to engage and encourage the crowd's participation in even more defined ways.

"Millions of people tuned in to watch Curiosity land, and **IdeaScale gave them a way to be a part of the future exploration of Mars**," said Rocky Lind, Information and Communications Coordinator at NASA, "More than simply gathering ideas, we want to excite the imagination and encourage engagement. IdeaScale allowed visitors to our site to do that in a number of different ways. It helps us decide what content to put on our site and what questions we ask in the future."

To learn more about the Mars Program Planning Group, visit www.nasa.gov/marsplanning.