

Review of the SBIR and STTR Programs at NASA

Meeting of the Committee (July 29-31, 2024)

Biographies of Guest Speakers

In order of appearance

LEON ALKALAI

Leon Alkalai is the founder of Mandala Space Ventures. Alkalai is a retired Technical Fellow of the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), California Institute of Technology where he spent 32 years after getting his PhD at UCLA in 1989. During his career at JPL, Alkalai held numerous leadership positions and was responsible for the capture leadership of both the GRAIL mission to the Moon (2007) and the INSIGHT lander on Mars (2012). For both efforts, Alkalai received Distinguished Individual Achievement medals from NASA in 2011 and 2019 respectively. Alkalai was also heading up JPL strategic partnerships and strategic planning for the Laboratory. In early 2021, Alkalai retired from JPL and created Mandala Space Ventures, a space-focused, Pasadena-based incubator for new start-ups in the emerging space economy. He is also the General Partner at the Explorer-1 Venture Fund which is also affiliated with the Mandala space incubator. Recently, Mandala launched its first new venture called Continuum Space Systems, a Software as a Service (SaaS) company for the emerging digital space economy.

MARK DAVIDSON

Mark Davidson is a member of the California Institute of Technology's Jet Propulsion Laboratory office of Small Business Innovation and Technology Partnerships and NASA's Western Water Applications office. He is the JPL Center Technology Transfer Lead (CTTL) for the NASA SBIR Program and a key contributor for the NASA Western Water Applications office in the coordination of projects with western states water managers.

Davidson has held positions as the Corporate Director of Business Strategy at Northrop Grumman Corporation where he was responsible for evolving the company's portfolio strategy associated with all defense electronics including space, air, ground and maritime domains and naval systems. In this function he also participated in M&A, Joint Venture, divestitures and spin-off activities. He also worked as a Corporate Treasurer and Head of Investor Relations at major aerospace parts distribution company. He is a former Presidential appointee having served in the Senior Executive Service as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Reserve Affairs and worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Office of Net Assessment. In addition, Davidson is a retired Navy Captain.

Davidson has participated in Executive Management studies at the Harvard School of Business focused on Corporate Strategy and valuation. He holds an MBA from the U.S.C. Marshall School of Business, a Diploma from the U.S. Navy War College, and a BA in physical geography from U.C.L.A.