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Google Funds \$30M X-Prize

Google and the X-Prize foundation announced at NextFest that the next X-Prize target is a privately funded lunar mission.

By [Brian Heater](#)

Google and the X-Prize foundation used Wired's fourth annual NextFest to announce the launch of a new initiative aimed at furthering the prospect of privately funded space exploration.

After Thursday morning's opening ceremonies, Dr. Peter H. Diamandis and Robert K. Weiss, the chairman and vice chairman of the X-Prize institution, joined Google cofounder Larry Page, Wired editor-in-chief Chris Anderson, NASA deputy administrator Shanna Dale, and astronaut **Buzz Aldrin** to announce the launch of the Lunar X Prize.

"In 1996, we introduced the first X-Prize to change how the public thought about space exploration," said Weiss, referring to the Ansari X prize, which challenged entrepreneurial teams to build private spaceships. "Until recently, space was off-limits to the public, but in 2004, it was proved that a reusable spacecraft could do it cheaper than any government-run ship."



With \$30 million in funding from Google, the Lunar X Prize seeks to encourage private companies to land a ship on the moon, a task long reserved for large national governments.

"In 1972, Moon 1.0 was abandoned," Weiss continued, referring to the large-scale abandonment of moon missions more than 30 years ago. "Earth's off-shore island, the moon, can become our greatest asset. The Google X-Prize is designed to kick start Moon 2.0."

Google's \$30 million purse will be split up among different important signposts throughout the program. A \$20 million grand prize will be awarded to the first team to soft land its spacecraft on the moon, rove on its surface for at least 500 meters, and transmit specified images and video to earth. A \$5 million prize will go to the second team to complete the task. If no one meets the challenge by December 31st 2012, the grand prize will drop to \$15. If it is still unmet in 2014, Google will terminate the prize.

Asked what sort of window X-Prize was looking at in terms of completion, Weiss answered that they were optimistically shooting for four years. As to how many teams they expect to register, X Prize chairman Dr. Peter H. Diamandis added, "rumor has it that one team is registering later today. I'm hoping for a half-dozen to a dozen team."

Bonus prizes will be awarded for additional tasks, such as imaging artifacts from past explorations, roving longer distances (5,000 meters or more), surviving the lunar night for two earth weeks, and discovering ice on the surface.

"Now you know we were serious when we introduced Google Moon, a few years ago," Larry Page told the crowd. "Science has a serious marketing problem, and I think this is the antidote."

Buzz Aldrin was on hand to present a plaque signed by himself and fellow Apollo astronauts, which will be affixed to competing shuttles. The plaque reads, in part, "May this plaque be placed on the moon and serve as a beacon to future explorers...In peace and with hope, for all mankind."

The ceremony concluded with a group countdown to the launch of the initiative. "Ladies and gentlemen, the clock has started!" announced Diamandis. "Let the race begin."

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