

# SN FOCUS

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**NORTH  
AMERICA**

## Local Strategies for Sky-High Ambitions

How leaders in  
Florida and Ohio  
are creating  
opportunities  
for growth



TOP: SPACE FLORIDA; BOTTOM: NASA

Top: The Space Florida Launch and Landing Facility has been a figurative and literal path to growth for the state's space companies as they look for the infrastructure needed to scale. Bottom: The VIPER engineering test team in Ohio has used lunar soil simulants and hand-picked rocks to mimic the surface of the moon's South Pole.

NORTH AMERICA | OHIO

# From the Midwest to the Moon

## Why space companies are betting on Ohio

NASA WILL TAKE ANOTHER STEP toward returning astronauts to the moon when Artemis 2 launches as early as this spring. During the 10-day mission, Orion will orbit Earth twice before traveling around the far side of the moon, marking the first time humans have entered lunar orbit in more than half a century.

Like so many missions before it, Artemis 2 will launch from Florida, with mission control in Texas. But Jim Free, a retired NASA associate administrator who previously oversaw Artemis, points to another U.S. state without which Artemis 2 would not be possible: Ohio — home to the Wright Brothers and 26 NASA astronauts, including Neil Armstrong and John Glenn; more than 640 aerospace supply companies; Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, site of the U.S. Space Force’s National Space Intelligence Center; and NASA’s Glenn Research Center, which encompasses the state-of-the-art Neil Armstrong Test Facility.

“The Neil Armstrong Test Facility has the world’s largest vacuum chamber. That’s the only place in the world where you could test the entire Orion spacecraft,” Free said. He added that Ohioans have helped develop “every fundamental technology that has advanced both human and robotic spacecraft, going back to when the liquid hydrogen architecture was picked for Apollo.”

Faced with growing geopolitical risks and critical supply chain vulnerabilities, space manufacturers that previously relied on foreign suppliers increasingly are reshoring operations in the United States. Although few may realize its prominence in America’s space history, Ohio leaders believe it’s time to make industry aware of the role the state can play in America’s space future, said J.P. Nauseef, president and CEO of JobsOhio, a private, nonprofit enterprise supporting economic development in Ohio.

“When you see a rocket launch in Florida, it’s people behind the scenes in Ohio who have solved the problems to make that possible,” Nauseef said. “For a mission to succeed, you need an affordable and abundant workforce; research institutions that can invent

and innovate; and a manufacturing base that can test and build the things you envision and create. There’s no other place in the country where those things converge in the same way that they do in Ohio.”

### People Power

For legacy companies and space startups alike, Ohio’s biggest draw is its workforce, said retired U.S. Air Force Gen. Lester Lyles, chairman of the NASA Advisory Council.

“I have consistently reminded people: As you’re looking for talent and expertise that apply to space, you need to broaden your aperture,” said Lyles, who has encouraged space operators to look beyond traditional talent centers in Florida, Texas and California. “Because of my long career that includes 36 years in the Air Force leading large aerospace firms and large aerospace activities, I know what the talent is in Ohio.”

The Buckeye state is home to 88 colleges and universities — including seven R1 Carnegie-level research institutions — that produce nearly 40,000 STEM graduates every year, many of whom have specialized degrees in space-related fields.

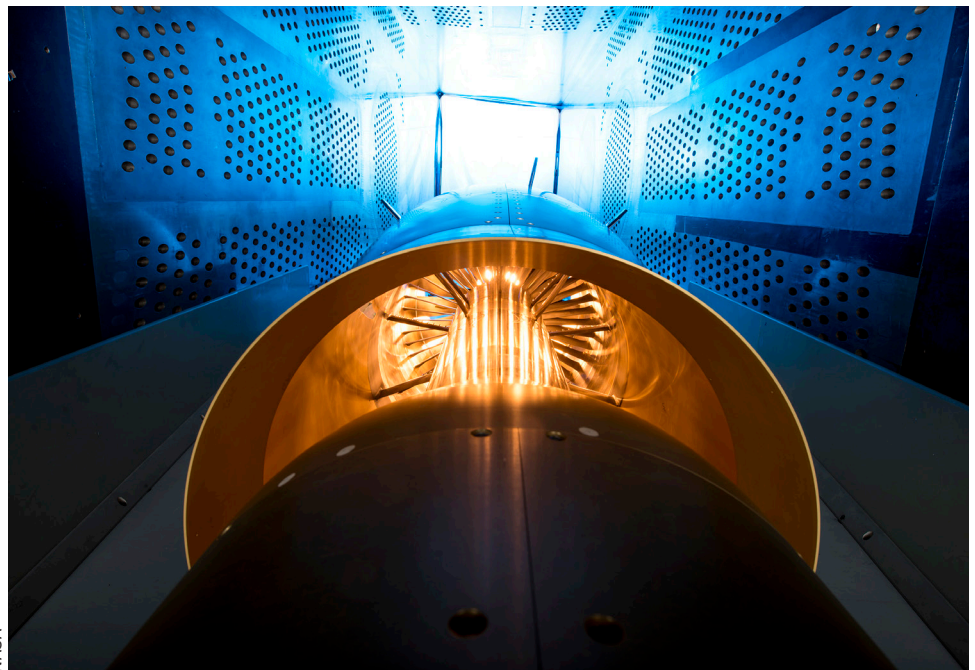
### ‘Proximity Matters’

Along with space talent, Ohio’s value proposition includes space infrastructure.

“Companies ... don’t have to replicate the expertise or facilities that already exist at NASA Glenn and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base,” said Free. He pointed to SpaceX, which conducted payload fairing tests for its Falcon 9 rocket at NASA’s Neil Armstrong Test Facility. “They don’t have to make those capital expenditures because they can be partial users of those facilities to access the experience and expertise they need to work through their problems.”

Even in a world defined by remote work, there’s no substitute for physical proximity to talent and technology, suggested Nauseef, who said being located near Ohio-based research centers, suppliers and customers can decrease costs and increase security, networking and collaboration, all of which can accelerate space innovation.

“Once you open people’s eyes to where the skills are and how they can be utilized, everybody wants to jump on board,” Lyles said.



A photograph from inside the 8' x 6' wind tunnel at NASA Glenn Research Center in Ohio where engineers tested a fan and inlet design.



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SPACE FLORIDA

Florida’s access to space infrastructure has been a key incentive for companies looking to expand their operations.

NORTH AMERICA | FLORIDA

# The Florida Model for Sustainable Aerospace Growth



**Q&A WITH ROBERT LONG,**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
SPACE FLORIDA

TWENTY YEARS AGO, the Florida legislature created Space Florida as a public corporation and innovation connector. The state has since emerged as one of the most robust space and aerospace ecosystems in the world by prioritizing long-term foundational investments over short-term subsidies. We spoke with Robert Long, Space Florida’s president and CEO. Long is an industry veteran and retired United States Space Force colonel who most recently served as commander for Space Launch Delta 30 and Western Launch and Test Range at Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

**Florida’s business model for aerospace growth is different from that of other states. Explain how it works.**

Often what we see across the country is a

focus on cash incentives up front. That gets you through the announcement and the first phase. But, depending on the company, that may be it. The Florida model is trying to focus on substance over subsidies. We work hard on lining up aerospace deals that work, and we make sure they last. Instead of a short-term window in which the company has to be successful, we establish a long-term partnership. The benefits of most of our programs accrue over time.

**You’ve modeled your approach after the venture capital world?**

Our approach is certainly founded upon really digging into a company, understanding the fundamentals and doing our due diligence. That’s targeted around ensuring that we understand not just the finances of the company, but also the infrastructure requirements. What will they need to grow? And does the state have that infrastructure in place? What are the workforce requirements? And of course, what’s the long term market

outlook for the company? We want to make sure we understand all that before public dollars are committed.

**How do you measure success this way?**

Ultimately, by whether we’re creating a sustainable ecosystem for industry to grow over time. Do we have that infrastructure in place? Is the access to capital there? Is it growing for the foreseeable future? And is the overall ecosystem supportive? If a large aerospace company is looking to grow or relocate into the state, it’s about making sure that’s all there, not just for that initial activity but to build strong foundations for the future.

**Space Florida has worked to boost infrastructure along the Space Florida Launch and Landing Facility so the launch sites can expand. And Amazon Leo recently built their payload processing center nearby. Tell me a little bit about what’s happening there.**

Florida treats space as an official mode of transportation, and — to my knowledge — it’s still the only state that does that. That allows us to be intentional about not just supporting our federal partners in terms of spaceport growth in the Cape Canaveral area, but also looking at it as a system across the state. We have two other licensed spaceports in Florida — Cecil Air and Space Port and Space Coast Regional Airport — and those are important nodes in our spaceport system. We were just talking to one company, recommending they take a look at some of the other spaceports because it’ll give them some more flexibility in terms of what they’re able to do. Not only does that geographic diversity strengthen resilience by expanding the opportunity beyond the Space Coast, but also it allows us to take advantage of programs that invest in infrastructure at all of those different locations.

**How can Florida businesses learn about Space Florida innovation and the research funding opportunities?**

We’ve got around 220 projects in our pipeline right now. We remain focused on making sure that we’re not only connecting with companies and educating them on our model and tools, but more importantly, understanding the companies and where they’re at in their growth phase. When that company reaches its next milestone and wants to expand further, they can take advantage of a toolkit that allows for growth and expansion in a sustainable way.

*For more information on how Space Florida is helping the industry grow, visit [spaceflorida.gov](http://spaceflorida.gov).*

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Real Leadership. Space Florida.

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