NASA announces $2M lunar lander prize

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The U.S. space agency announced it will offer $2 million in prizes to competing teams successfully demonstrating a prototype lunar lander.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Centennial Challenges Program will offer the prizes during the X Prize competition this weekend at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, N.M. Winning teams must meet the requirements of the Northrop Grumman Lunar Lander Challenge.

The project is aimed at accelerating technological development leading to a commercial vehicle capable of ferrying cargo between lunar orbit and the moon's surface.

To win the prize, teams must demonstrate a rocket-propelled vehicle and payload that takes off vertically from the New Mexico competition site, climbs to a defined altitude, flies for a predetermined amount of time and lands vertically on a target that is a fixed distance from the launch pad.

After landing, the vehicle must take off again within a predetermined time, fly for a certain amount of time and then land on its original launch pad. There are two levels of difficulty, with awards for first and second place at each level.

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