

TESS Users Committee Meeting Report

19 February 2026

The TESS Users Committee met on January 30 2026 at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. The meeting focused on the following topics:

- Synergies with other missions
- Software & Databases
- Guest Investigator Program
- Broadening Participation

The TUC also discussed the following items upon request from the TESS project:

- Proposal for a new policy for the rapid analysis of TESS data
- Preparation for the 4th Extended Mission (EM4) Senior Review proposal
- The need for a new community survey

Recommendations:

Based on the discussions, the TUC makes the following recommendations:

1. The TUC recommends that the TESS project formalize procedures for special observing campaigns. The recent 3I/ATLAS observing campaign has established a precedent for TESS deviating from its nominal survey strategy to observe a single important object. Any future analogous campaigns should adhere to a well-defined procedure. Such formalization should encompass a procedure for proposing a special observing campaign, prescreening of ideas, review of ideas by an independent panel, a risk assessment for GI programs that may be disrupted, and a well-defined procedure for community involvement (including publication policies, if applicable). The TUC recommends that the bar for TESS performing future special observing campaigns be set high, and that, should any such future campaigns be conducted, they consume at most a small fraction of the regular survey time.
2. The TUC recommends that the TESS project ensure complementary efforts between the SPOC and QLP light curve production. Additionally, it should provide a mechanism to enable on-demand light curve production. While the TUC was pleased to learn that the SPOC FFI light curve production is increasing, the committee acknowledges that QLP light curves are important for the TESS community, particularly for faint stars and projects requiring simple selection functions. The TUC recommends that the TESS project establishes a formal mechanism for users to request homogeneous light curves for subsets of stars. This can be facilitated through a webform on the TSSC website that formally submits such requests to the SPOC and QLP light curve teams, or a direct

server that produces light curves on-demand similar to existing ground-based surveys such as ASAS-SN and ZTF.

3. The TUC recommends that 20-second and 2-minute target lists be made public earlier in order for the community to make better use of the DDT program. Currently, these target lists are made available 1-2 weeks before the start of the campaign, and sometimes after the start of a sector, while DDT proposals are due 6 weeks before the start of a campaign. This timeline mismatch prevents community members who unsuccessfully proposed targets through the GI program to use the DDT program as a resource for getting their targets observed. This is particularly important since the DDT program is regularly undersubscribed, as reported by the TESS project.
4. The TUC recommends that the TESS project continues to provide up to three No-Cost Extensions for TESS GI Principal Investigators to utilize their funding. University administration overheads, timeline mismatches with graduate student recruitment, and other factors can frequently result in long delays in the expenditure of GI funds. This is particularly pertinent for small programs, which only have a nominal one-year performance.
5. The TUC supports initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the MAST query service. While the TUC acknowledges the significance of light curve previews, particularly for newer TESS users who may predominantly utilize the MAST query service, replacing the previews with symbols indicating light curve availability represents a small penalty for improving the efficiency reduction due to the increasing volume of TESS light curves.
6. The TUC recommends that the TSSC move or mirror the list of data analysis software packages to a GitHub repository. This move would enable the community to submit new packages and contribute to the maintenance of the list. The current software package list on the TSSC website is incomplete. By transitioning to a framework that facilitates user submissions of pull requests (with basic checks on the functionality and usage of the submitted packages), the list can be kept more current.
7. The TUC recommends that the TESS project investigate the proportion of primarily undergraduate and non-R1 university engagement in TESS data products and implement strategies to enhance the participation of such researchers. Examples include providing travel support (e.g., registration fee waivers) for first-time attendees of TESS Science Conferences or incorporating a brief section into Large GI programs to outline the proposing team's plans to engage with researchers from such universities (e.g., through collaborative visits).
8. The TUC recommends that the project strengthens its synergies with other facilities such as SPHEREx, Roman, Rubin, and other current operating ground telescopes. In particular, observations which can be acquired simultaneously with such missions and

facilities could serve as powerful potential science drivers for future extended missions. Examples for strengthening such synergies include encouraging the use of combined datasets in GI calls or coordinating pointing strategies that will result in simultaneous datasets.

9. The TUC recommends that the TESS project investigate venues for the TESS Follow-Up Program (TFOP) infrastructure and observers to enhance their involvement and support from other missions. TFOP is a unique collaboration and legacy product of the TESS Mission, and its follow-up capabilities will be highly pertinent to missions beyond TESS, such as PLATO, Roman, and Ariel. Preserving the structure and expertise of TFOP should be a priority for NASA as TESS transitions into further extended missions.
10. The TUC recommends to improve communication and coordination with the JWST team to enable simultaneous observations. Such observations are powerful science drivers, but scheduling such observations is often difficult and cannot be executed.

Policy for the rapid analysis of TESS data

The TUC supports the implementation of the policy, which allows TESS team members to analyze data of extraordinary transient events before data is public in order to aid with follow-up efforts. While the TUC had some concerns about “going back” to a model of proprietary data access, the significant time savings (>12 hours) and benefit to the community of having early alerts available outweigh these concerns. The TUC suggests that the TESS project works with MAST to make the subset of data relevant to the transient event available earlier than the remaining data, which would reduce the time period of the data becoming public.

Extended Mission 4 Planning and Community Survey

The TUC encourages the TESS Project to follow a similar strategy of community engagement in the planning process for EM4 as it did in EM3, including studies of possible non-standard observing modes and possibilities for the community to weigh in on possible strategies for EM4. The TUC recommends starting this process in early 2027, which will align with plans for the TUC to conduct a new Community Survey, and gives sufficient time to analyze the results before the start of the EM4 proposal development in the summer of 2027.