

Across the Cosmos September 2026: The Legacy of Nancy Grace Roman

The [Nancy Grace Roman Telescope](#), appropriately named for the woman known as the “[mother of the Hubble Space Telescope](#),” was launched on August 30, 2026. The Roman Telescope will observe from a similar vantage point as the JWST, about 930,000 miles away from Earth in the direction opposite the Sun, which will enable it to carry out its sensitive infrared observations. Together, [Roman and JWST](#) will be a powerful team for probing cosmic questions from the scale of small bodies in our Solar System to the furthest reaches of the cosmos. While JWST offers very high-resolution observations in small patches of the sky, Roman’s field of view is about 100 times larger.

The telescope’s namesake, Nancy Grace Roman, joined NASA early in 1959, six months after NASA was formed. She was the first female executive at NASA, and she became the first Chief of Astronomy. One of Dr. Roman’s biggest challenges was getting the Hubble Space Telescope approved by Congress. Many years later, when she was asked what she thought was the most interesting discovery by Hubble, she replied “dark energy.” Indeed, in many ways the mystery of dark energy has deepened since its discovery, as this strange pressure appears to change over time. Since dark energy is thought to comprise 68% of the total contents of the Universe, it is intimately connected with the ultimate fate of the Universe. Illuminating the nature of dark energy (and whether it actually exists) is one of Roman’s major science goals.

Although Roman is expected to advance many areas of cosmology, it has an important role to play much closer to home as well, and may prove transformational to understanding our own Solar System. I encourage you to check out this [recent blog post](#) about how PSI Senior Scientist Susan Benecchi has been involved in planning the science for Roman’s study of small icy bodies in our Solar System.

We live in an era of incredible astronomical technology! At the same, we are witnessing the deepest cuts to federal funding for basic scientific research with these remarkable instruments that we’ve seen in decades. I know this is a difficult time for many, but if you can, please consider whether you’re able to help [support](#) the Planetary Science Institute. PSI’s [Who-We-Are](#) statement nicely summarizes how our commitment to our values is as strong as our commitment to doing excellent science.

Until next month,

Grace

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