policy maintained the earlier scientific objectives for solar system exploration but extended the time for obtaining the data for satisfying those objectives. New plans also envisioned spreading the return of data over more limited and less expensive planetary spacecraft.[58]

Missions under the new policy would have much more limited science objectives than the Viking and Voyager projects of the prior decade. The members of NASA's Solar System Exploration Committee were concerned about possible effects of Reagan administration budget cuts on the Galileo Jupiter orbiter/probe mission. At the same time, the National Academy of Sciences expressed concerns about a proposed 12 percent reduction in federal research and development expenditures, and the head of MIT's Department of Physics expressed fears that such a cut would diminish manpower in the physical sciences to pre-Sputnik levels.[59]

Space technology supporters searched for positive intepretations of President Reagan's 4 July 1982 welcome to the astronauts returning from the fourth shuttle orbiter at Edwards Air Force Base, before a crowd estimated at 500,000. The most promising Reagan statement was: "we must look aggressively to the future by demonstrating the potential of the shuttle and establishing a more permanent presence in space." The president appeared to recommit the nation to the shuttle program, to more options for military uses of space, and to continued planetary exploration if the budget problems eased. "While the president did not say yes to anything," reported a trade journal, "neither did he say no."[60]

In the RTG program at this juncture, technical developments went forward methodically while space-mission schedules continued to slip. The problem was how to turn the "maybes" of potential users to "yeses." Even more important, was a need to generate a climate for "yeses," reinforced by successes, that represented a space program with purpose, continuity, and momentum. This could not be done by a program alone. As Webb had stressed in the days of Apollo, the larger environment was an important determinant of opportunity and action in the operations of large-scale endeavors. Key leaders of such endeavors must be sensitive to the larger environment and engage in relationships to influence decisions. For a component program of a large-scale endeavor in space the most appropriate axiom was: Be ready when opportunity appears.