

# cFS Overview



Version 1.10  
December 2023

- **Objectives**

- Introduce flight software (FSW) concepts and core Flight System (cFS) architectural features

- **Intended audience**

- Spacecraft technical managers, systems engineers, discipline engineers, and software engineers

- **Prerequisites**

- An interest in learning about FSW and the cFS
- No programming skills required

1. Flight Software Introduction
2. Core Flight System(cFS) Introduction

Appendix A: Acronyms

Appendix B: cFS Architectural Goals

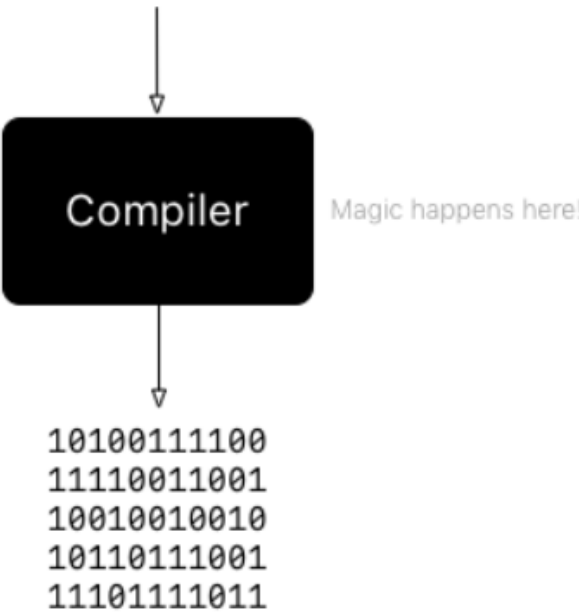
Appendix C: Online Resources



# Flight Software Introduction

- Microcode are instructions and data processed by a microprocessor
- Programming languages are formal languages (i.e. grammatical rules) that are translated into microcode by a compiler

```
func greet() = {  
  Console.println("Hello, World!")  
}
```



- Interpreted languages such as Python, Ruby, and JavaScript run on a virtual machines (VMs) and the VM is ported to different processors

- An *Embedded Computer* is a computer that is integrated in a product
- Embedded Computers do not usually have a keyboard, mouse, or monitor interface



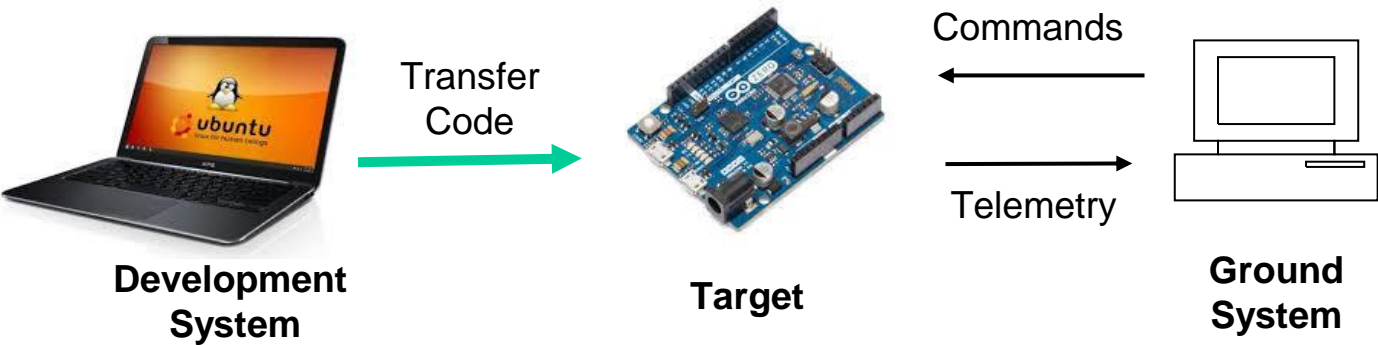
*Embedded Software* is software that runs on an Embedded Computer in order to make a device or product work

“Embedded software is the opposing thumb of hardware”

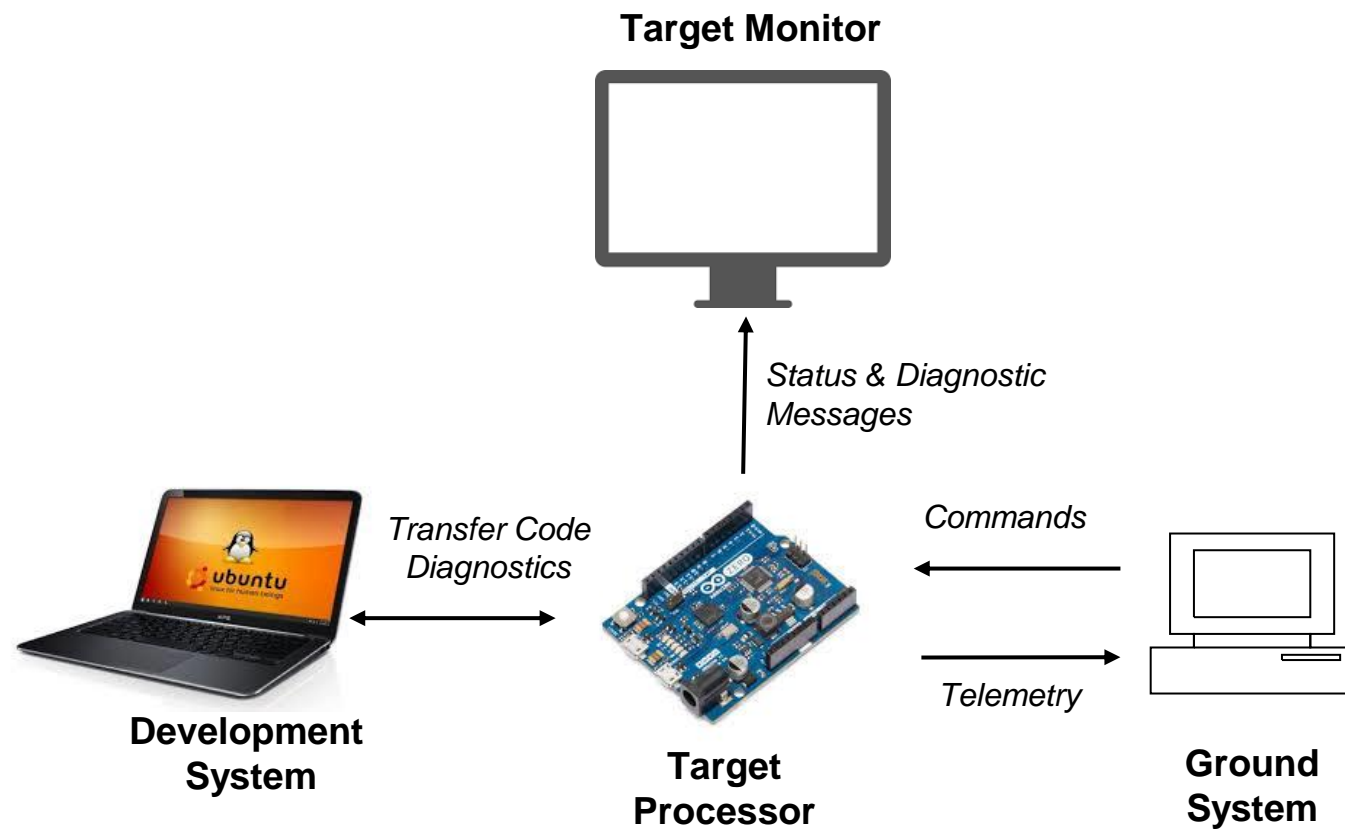
- **Microcontroller**
  - Typically, limited resources: low power, small memory, and slower clock speeds
  - Typically, no operating system
  - For example, the processor embedded with reaction wheel assembly
- **Embedded Operating System**
  - Real-time preemptive multi-tasking
  - Typically, much smaller than Windows or OS X
  - Examples include VxWorks, RTEMS, and FreeRTOS
- ***Embedded System***
  - The combination of an *Embedded Computer* and *Embedded Software*



- **Use a Windows, Mac, or Linux computer to write the code**
  - Programming Languages used
    - For Flight Software: C, C++, Assembly Language, sometimes Ada
    - For Ground and test software: C, C++, Python, Java, Ruby, etc.
- **Write code, cross-compile for target processor, transfer object code to embedded computer, control embedded system with a ground system**
- **This is known as Cross Development**







### Target Processor

- A processor that runs the cFS target image

### Development System

- Used to build and transfer the cFS target image to the target processor
- Requires a 'cross compiler' if the target process is different than the development system
- May include runtime diagnostic tools

### Target Monitor

- A common diagnostic tool used to help verify the embedded system is operating correctly
- Often a monitor connected over a serial port

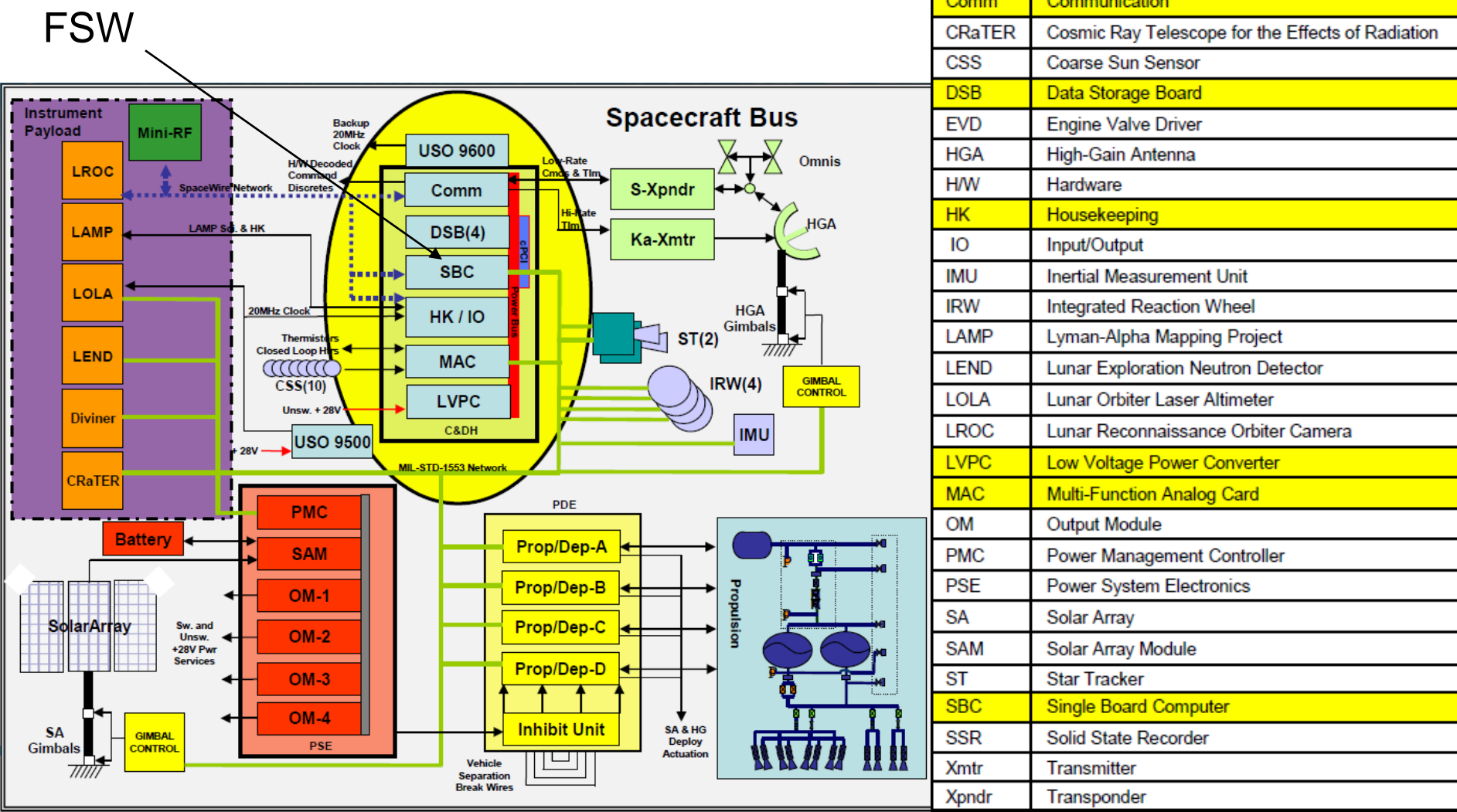
### Ground System

- An application that sends command messages to the target and receives telemetry messages from the target
- The command & telemetry communications link may vary between test configurations and operations

- **A few terms:**
  - **Spacecraft Bus** – usually refers to the fundamental systems of a spacecraft, i.e.
    - Mechanical Structure
    - Electrical System
    - Power System
    - Command and Data Handling System (C&DH)
    - Attitude Control System/ Propulsion System
    - RF System
    - Thermal System
  - **Payloads** – refers to the instruments on board, i.e.
    - Cameras, Telescopes, Radars, etc
  - **Observatory** – Usually refers to the entire system, i.e. the combination of the Spacecraft Bus and the Payloads

- **Flight processor clock speeds are in the MHz range while our laptops are in the GHz range**
  - NICER (6/12/17) 83Mhz Broad Reach 440 Power PC
- **Non-volatile memory**
  - GPM (2/27/14) 2MB banks of EEPROM for each FSW image
  - Compressed operating system and apps
- **Flight RAM in Megabyte range while our laptops are in the Gigabyte range**
  - GPM (2/27/14) 36MB RAM

More than 20 Interfaces controlled by FSW on this single string example





- **Curiosity Probe's Computer Reset (2/25/19)**
  - “Last week, its computer rebooted without warning. Now, NASA engineers are trying to figure out what caused the unprompted restart.”



- **Israeli Lunar Lander Suffers Glitch on Way to the Moon (2/27/19)**



- "During the pre-maneuver phase the spacecraft computer reset unexpectedly, causing the maneuver to be automatically cancelled,"
- "The engineering teams ... are examining the data and analyzing the situation. At this time, the spacecraft's systems are working well, except for the known problem in the star tracker."
- <https://www.space.com/israel-moon-lander-suffers-glitch.html>

- Detect flight hardware anomalies and failures
  - Sensors, Actuators, Clocks, CPU, Memory, Power, Thermal, Communications
- Respond to onboard anomalies/failures – pre-planned actions, e.g.,
  - Capture Diagnostic Data
  - Use “numerically safe” data for current control law cycle
  - Reconfigure onboard hardware and/or software – minimize the problem
  - ‘Safe’ all Flight Hardware (Science Instruments, Spacecraft Hardware)
  - Ensure Sun is on the Solar Array Panels -- Maintain Power Positive State
  - Notify Ground of problems
- FSW can often compensate for hardware problems found during spacecraft I&T or post-launch

## Principle Investigator

- “I want all science data in a timely manner”

## Other spacecraft subsystems

- “It would be really nice if I could see data X, Y, and Z at rate N”

## FSW Test Team

- “We want to see all of the data all of the time”

## Spacecraft Integration and Test team

- “We want to see or at least log all of the data all of the time”
- “We also need to test as we will fly”

## Operational Managers and Spacecraft Operators

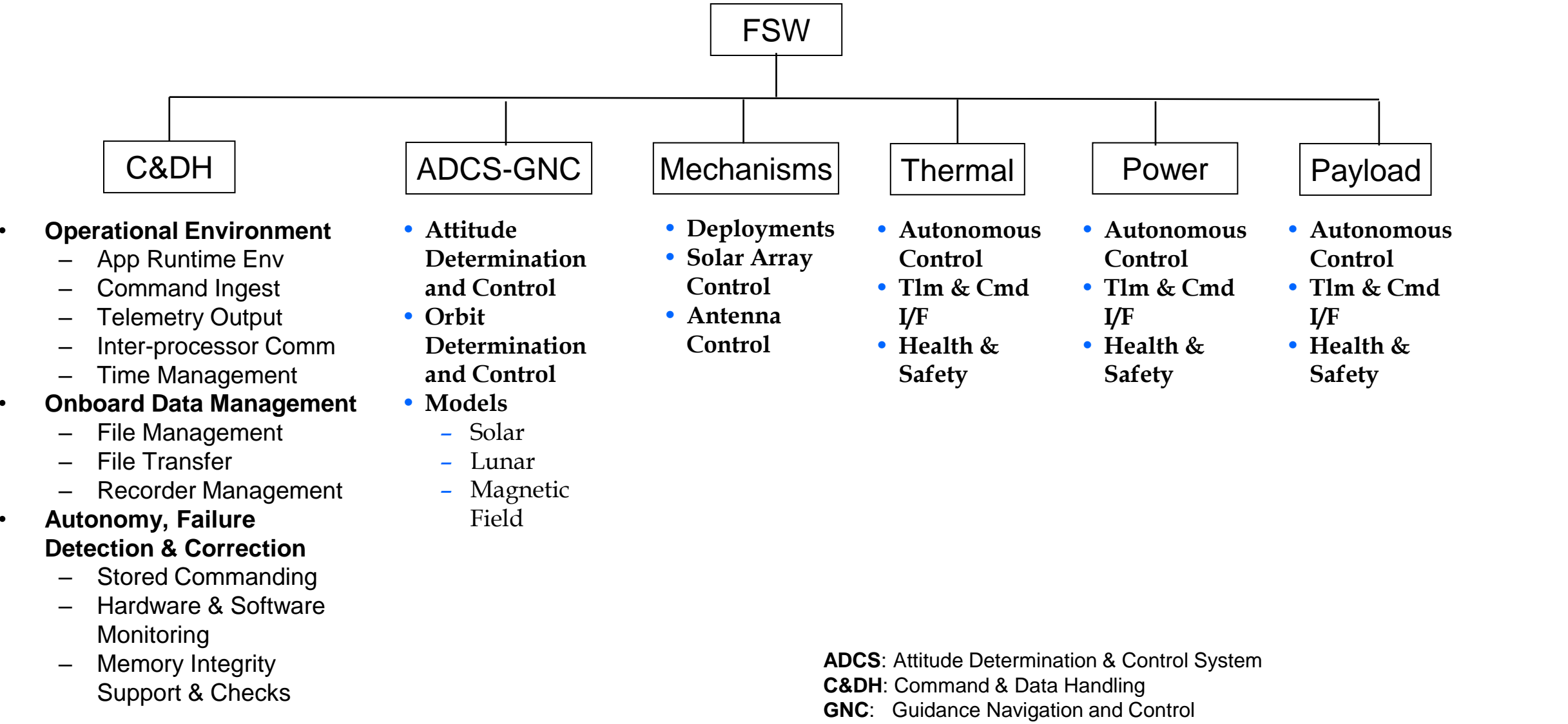
- “Make my life simple and cheap”

## FSW On Orbit Maintenance Team

- “Can we access/view data/code X and change it to Y?”

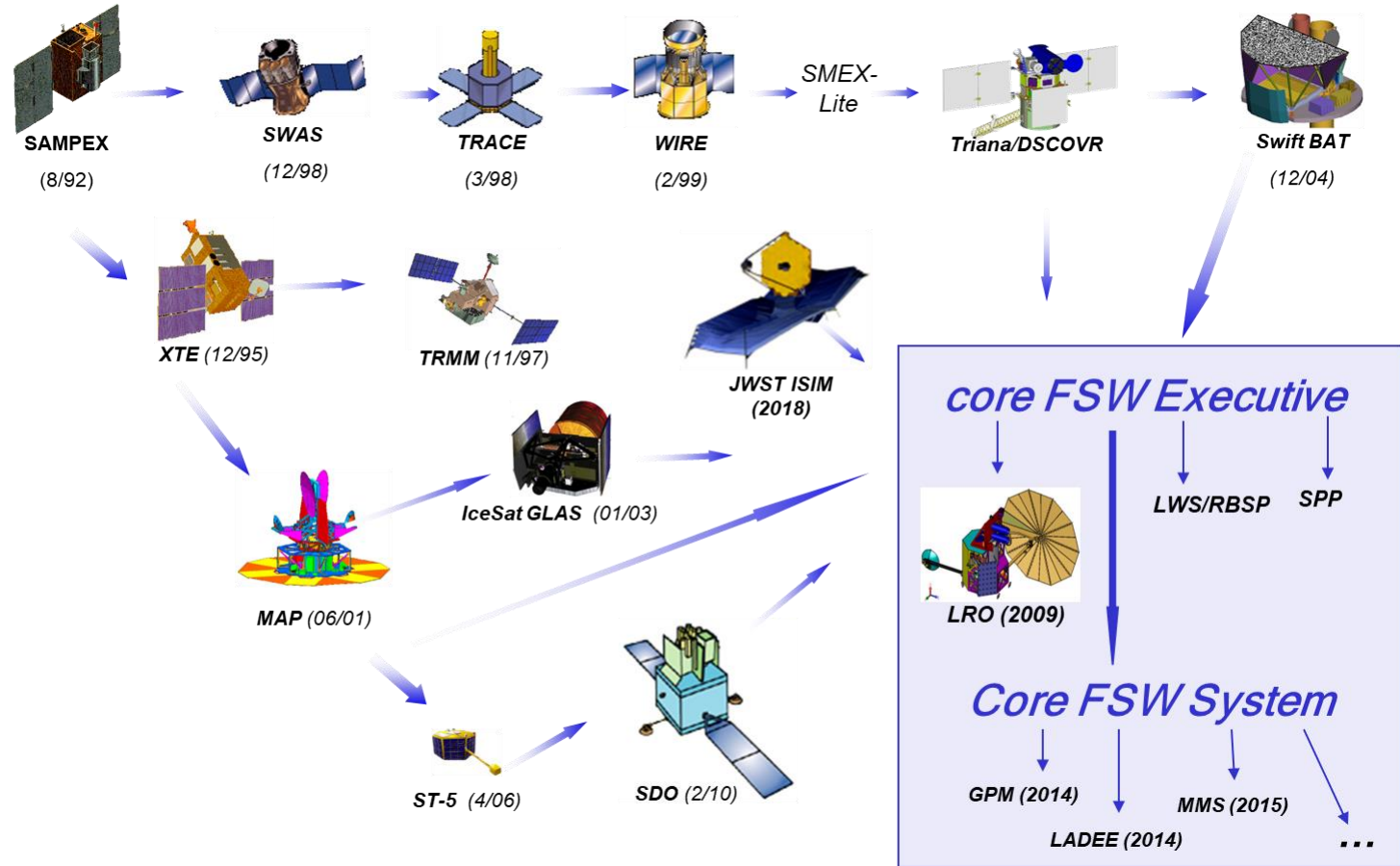
- **FSW systems often have a large number of functional requirements as shown on the next slide**
- **The functions need to operate concurrently and at different rates**
- **The functions have different levels of criticality and lower critical functions must not impact mission critical functions**





# Core Flight System Introduction

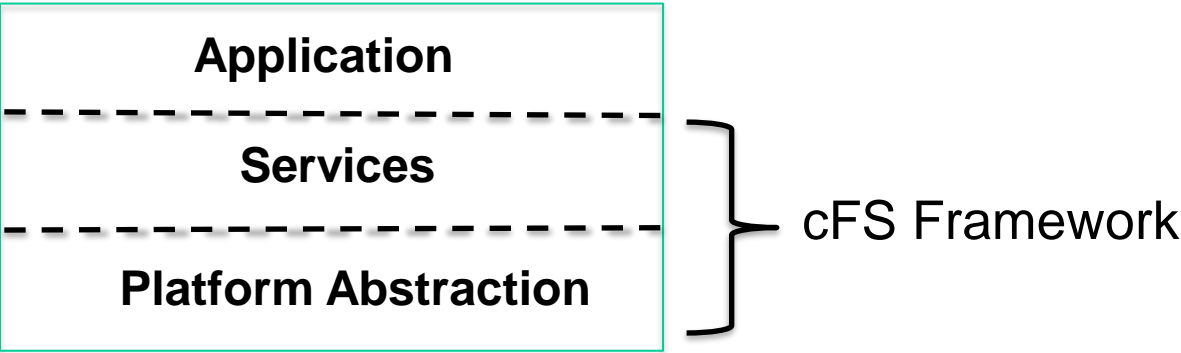
For decades the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center has been designing, building, and operating spacecraft customized for specific science goals



- Flight software (FSW) design patterns evolved that leveraged commonality and parametrized variability
- The core Flight System (cFS) was developed as project-independent FSW product line

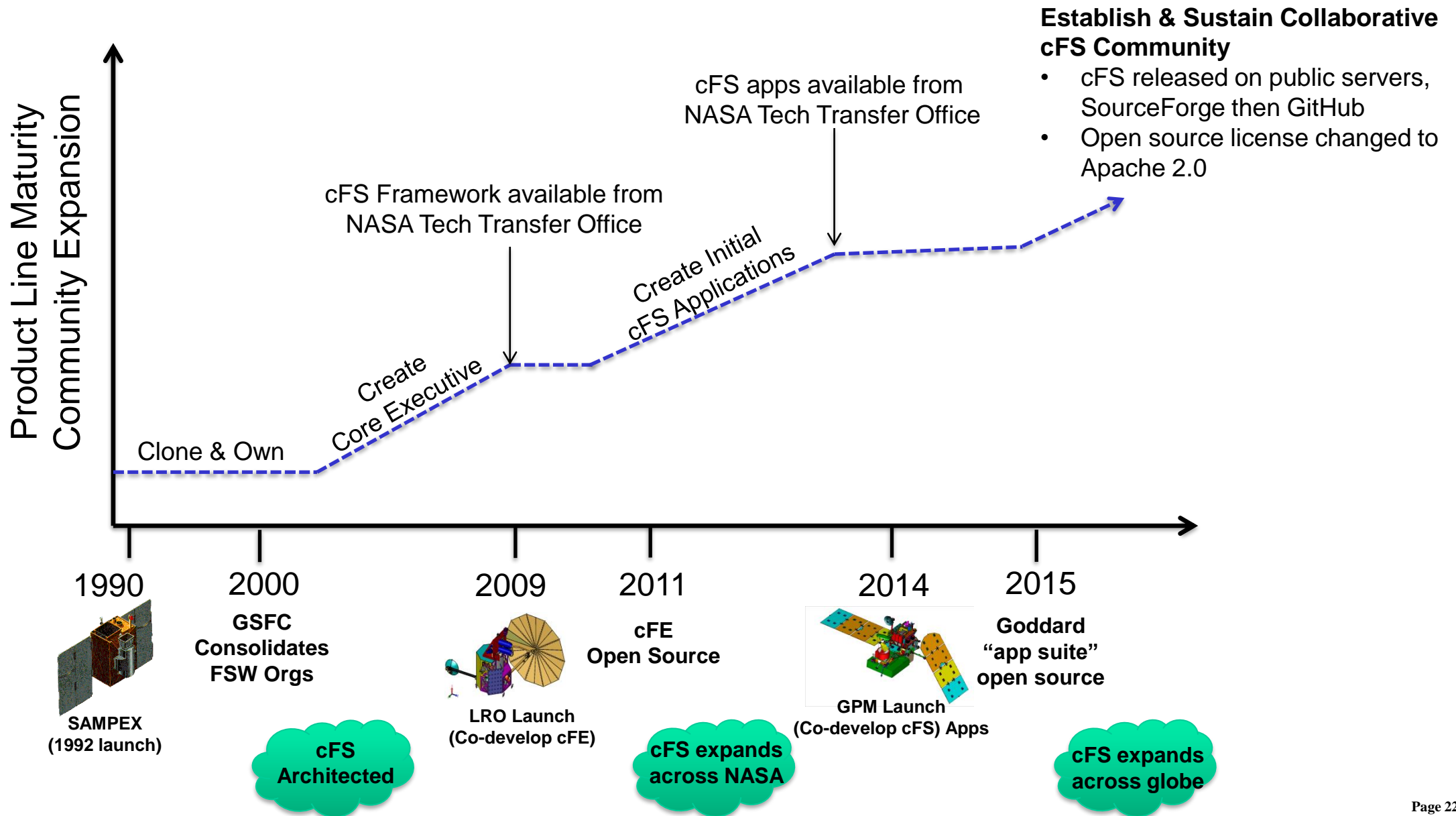


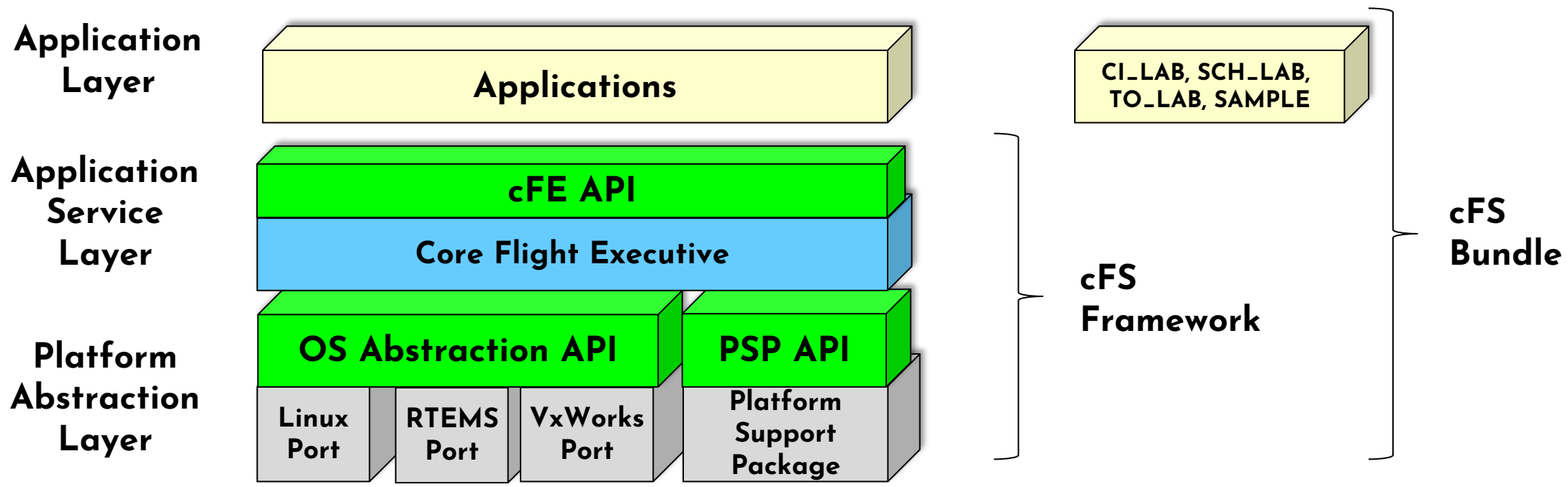
- The cFS was intentionally designed to meet specific cFS architectural goals and quality attributes that are summarized in Appendix C
- The cFS uses a three-tiered software architecture that provides a portable and extendable framework with a product line deployment model
  - Platform Abstraction Layer supports portability
  - The Service Layer provides an Application Programming Interface (API) enabling application reuse across missions
  - Compile-time configuration parameters and run-time command/table defined parameters support adaptability and scalability





- **The cFS Framework and reusable app suite designs are based on lessons learned over decades of experience**
  - These lessons include the entire spacecraft lifecycle that includes development, operations, and maintenance
  - This perspective is very important because each phase may impose design requirements and/or constraints that are not always complimentary
- **The cFS component designs and parameterization address many of the FSW challenges previously listed, for example...**
  - The cFS framework provides services to preserve data across process resets
  - Mission functionality is distributed across apps that each have their own execution thread and priority
  - Message filter tables allow telemetry downlink content and rates to be tuned for specific testing and operational use cases
- **FSW engineering is a systems engineering endeavor because the FSW is integrating multiple subsystems into a single system that must operate as a single system. In order to design the best cFS system, or any FSW system, a FSW expert should be involved from early formulation stages to...**
  - Participate in trades: ground/flight, hardware/software, build/buy, budget options, etc.
  - Champion requirements, design, and interface features with knowledge of all of the customers and spacecraft lifecycle needs





TBD Notes

- **Write once run anywhere the cFS framework has been deployed**
- **Framework has been ported to many popular hardware platform/operating system platforms including MUSTANG and SpaceCube**
- **Goddard has released 15 applications that provide common command and data handling functionality such as**
  - Stored command management and execution
  - Onboard data storage file management
- **Reduce project cost and schedule risks**
  - High quality flight heritage applications
  - Focus resources on mission-specific functionality
- **Framework provides seamless application transition from technology efforts to flight projects**



## Framework

- The set of individual services, applications, tools, and infrastructure managed by the open source community Configuration Control Board (CCB).

## Bundle

- An executable version of the framework configured for a nominal Linux system. Links compatible versions of the framework elements as a recommended starting point for new cFS-based systems.

## Component

- An individual application, service, or tool that can be used in a cFS-based system

## Distribution

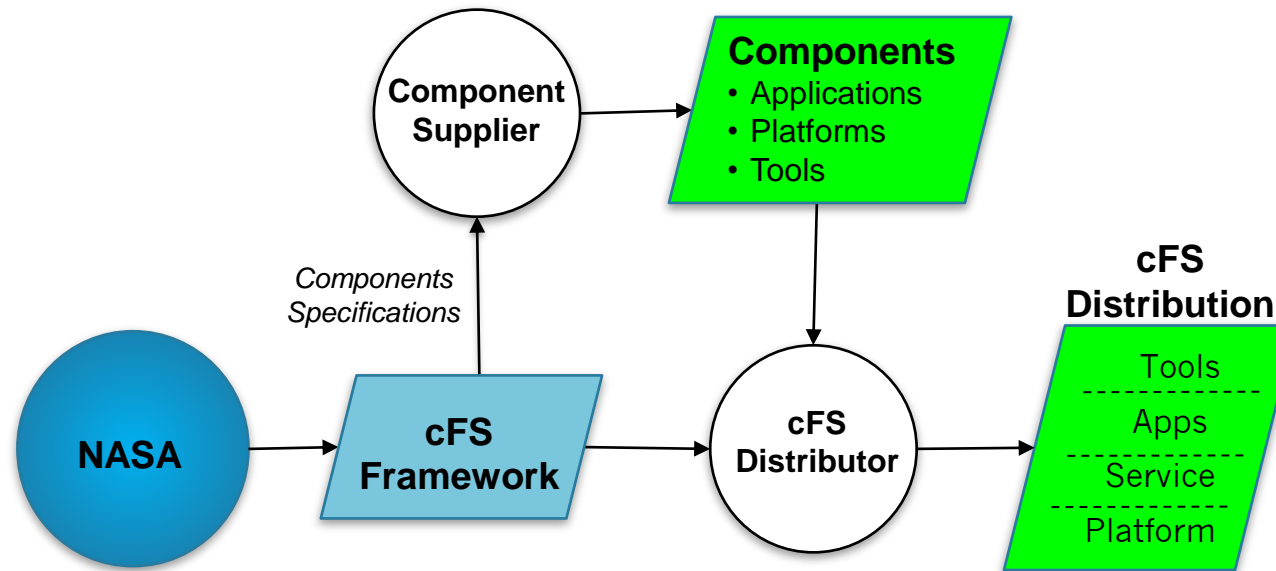
- A set of custom components packaged together with the framework; generally created and provided by a cFS user (individual or group) with specific needs (e.g. a NASA center, the GSFC SmallSat Project Office)

## cFE vs cFS

- cFE is the Core Flight Executive services and API – cFS is a general collective term for the framework and the growing set of components

- **cFS Framework funding primarily comes from projects**
  - In 2023 the Artemis Gateway program is the primary funding (cFS is in their interoperability spec)
  - cFS strategic decisions are driven by NASA projects which may or may not align with the open source community's priorities
- **A NASA multi-center Configuration Control Board (CCB) manages releases of the open source cFS Framework**
  - The CCB works with projects to determine which issues and changes are in each release
- **Cumbersome cFS Framework release process (discussed later)**
- **Applications are maintained by the organization that created the apps**
  - Currently NASA Ames, Goddard, and Johnson maintain individual app repositories
  - The organization is responsible for funding and for maintaining compatibility with different cFS Framework versions
  - Other organizations have created apps that are included in a cFS Distribution (discussed later)

- **Hard for organizations to adopt the cFS**
  - Steep learning curve with some online training material but no courses offered
  - Requires highly motivated teams to train themselves
  - On small teams, there may only be one cFS expert so they become critical to the project's success
- **Successfully using the cFS on a mission requires disciplined systems engineering**
  - Most of the available online resources do not address cFS systems engineering
  - The cFS repo list available components and distributions but it's up to the user to figure which components they may need and how to use them
  - Apps often work together to achieve goals and implement functional requirements
    - The reusable apps are documented as separate components so it is often unclear how the apps can be used collectively
- **Github discussions are the primary technical support mechanism**
  - They're helpful but responses are not always timely
- **Some artifacts were developed for Goddard-specific ground systems and have not been redesigned**
  - Table tools – Generate binary table files and display binary table files
  - Testing scripts



- **Organizations, not just NASA, supply components (applications, platforms and tools) and cFS Distributions**
  - What would motivate an organization to be a supplier or distributor?
  - Would organizations spend resources on assets given the current NASA cFS Framework strategic path is driven by NASA projects?
- **One component supplier value proposition**
  - As the number of supported platforms increases then apps become more valuable
  - As the number of apps increases then supporting a cFS platform become more valuable



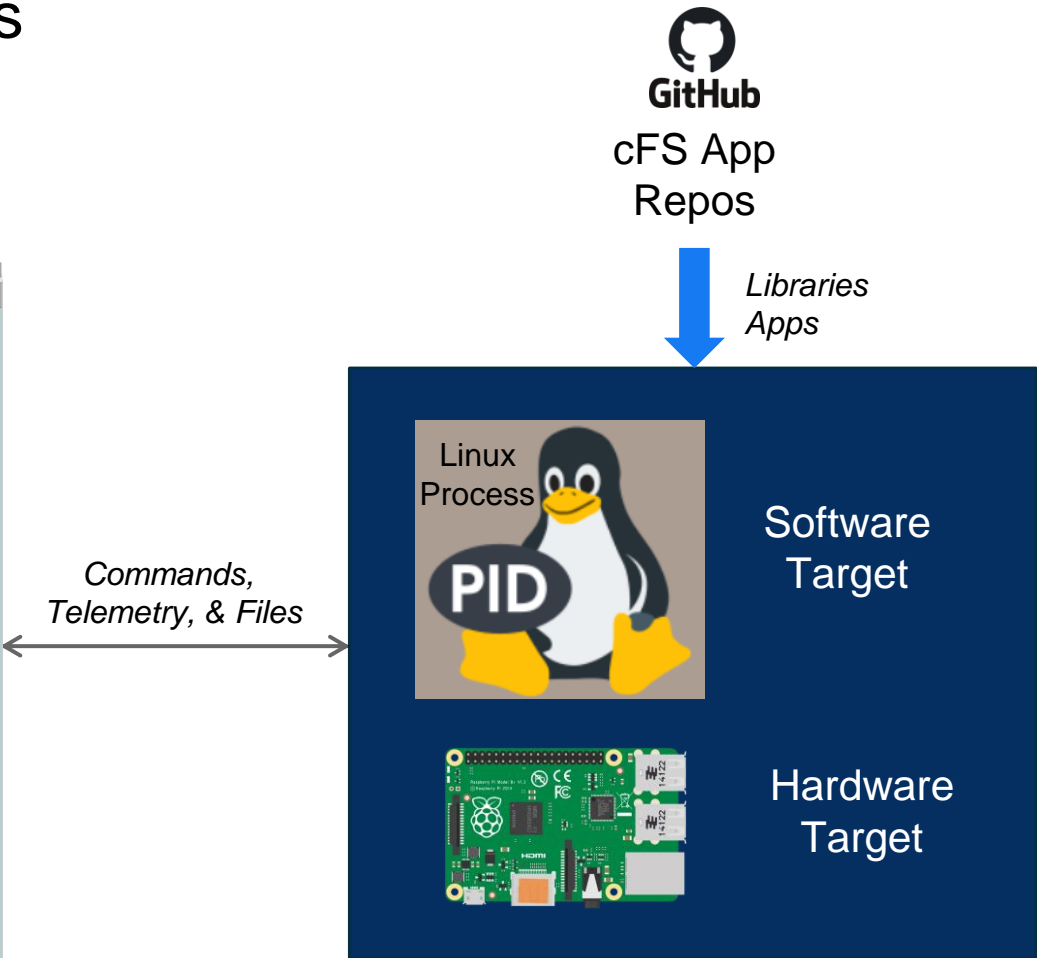
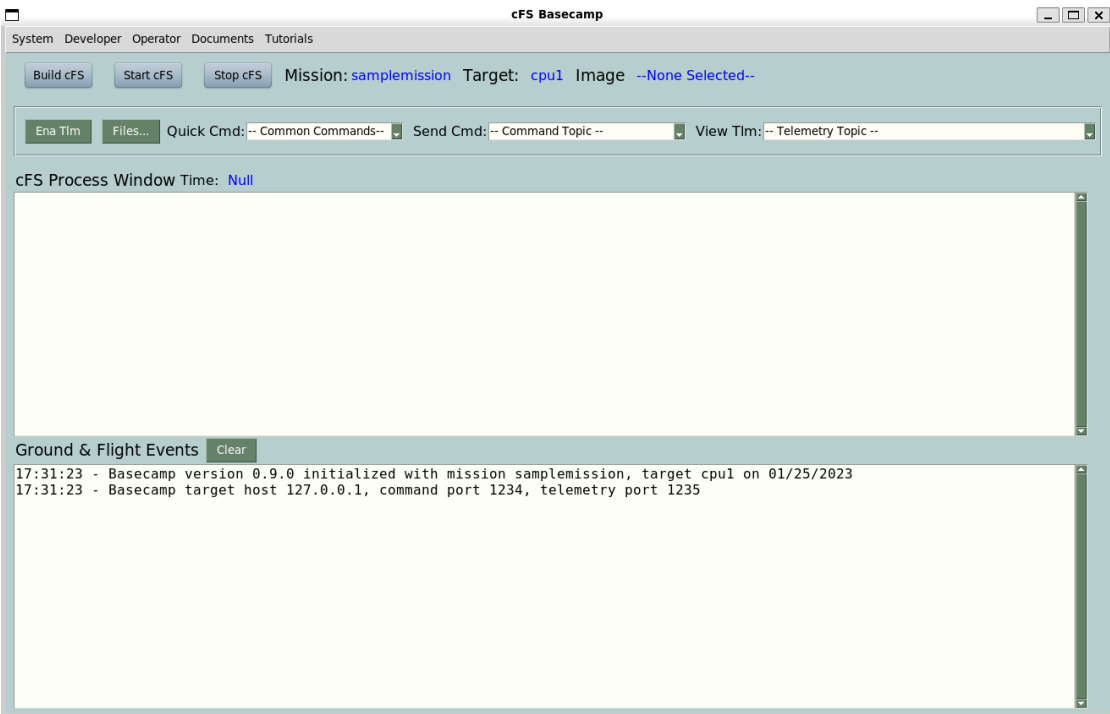
- **In 2019 vendors starting to offer processor boards integrated with the cFS**
  - AI Tech partnered with Embedded Flight Systems to offer the cFS integrated on the SP0-S Single Board Computer
  - Genesis Engineering developing an integrated GEN6000 (SpaceCube 2.0) cFS product
  - Genesis pursuing a Space Act Agreement (SAA) that would include the creation of a platform certification test suite
  - I am not aware of anything since 2019
- **A list of operating system ports is maintained at <https://github.com/cfs-tools/cfs-platform-list>**
- **Apps have not been individually been released, but new apps have been produced as part of a distributions that are listed on the next slide**
- **In 2023 cFS Basecamp supports an “app store” model for cFS target integration**
  - Developed for cFS-based educational courses and projects
  - Long term goal is to provide an app migration path from cFS Basecamp to flight missions
  - Relies on a NASA cFS Electronic Data Sheet toolchain that is not part of the official cFS Framework
  - Currently does not use any NASA apps

Name/Link	Provider	Status	Description
<a href="#">cFS Basecamp</a>	Open STEMware	Use a cFS tech branch that is not current with the latest cFS Framework.	Basecamp provides a lightweight environment to help you learn NASA's core Flight System (cFS) and create app-based solutions for your projects. Basecamp's default cFS target runs on Linux and includes an app suite that provides a complete operational environment including support for onboard file management and transferring files between the ground and flight systems.
<a href="#">cFS Bundle</a>	NASA GSFC	Current with latest cFS Framework	Contains the cFS Framework packaged with additional components to create a system that can easily be built, executed, and unit tested on a Linux platform. The bundle is not fully verified as an operational system, and is provided as a starting point vs an end product.
<a href="#">cFS Framework-101</a>	NASA MSFC	Functional but outdated. Last updates in 2019.	A training tool for individuals to learn how to develop software with NASA-developed Core Flight software (CFS) framework.
<a href="#">NASA Operational Simulator for Small Satellites (NOS3)</a>	NASA IV&V	Not current with latest cFS Framework	NOS3 provides a complete cFS system designed to support satellite flight software development throughout the project life cycle. It includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•42 Spacecraft dynamics and visualization, NASA GSFC</li> <li>• cFS – core Flight System, NASA GSFC</li> <li>• COSMOS – Ball Aerospace</li> <li>• ITC Common – Loggers and developer tools, NASA IV&amp;V ITC</li> <li>• NOS Engine – Middleware bus simulator, NASA IV&amp;V ITC</li> </ul>
<a href="#">OpenSatKit (OSK)</a>	Open STEMware	Runs on Ubuntu 18.04 and earlier. No longer supported	OSK provides a complete cFS system to simplify the cFS learning curve, cFS deployment, and application development. The kit combines three open source tools to achieve these goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cFS – core Flight System, NASA GSFC</li> <li>• COSMOS – command and control platform for embedded systems, Ball Aerospace</li> <li>• 42 dynamic simulator, NASA GSFC</li> </ul>

- **Intended to help with many of the issues listed on “Consequences of cFS Open Source Program” slide**
- **Shortens path to productivity with built-in tutorials and hands on exercises**
- **Simplifies the creation of hardware/software STEM educational projects**
  - Download and integrate cFS libraries & apps with a few mouse clicks
- **Online educational resources**
- **[future] Automated transition to OpenC3 ground system**

- Send commands, display telemetry, and transfer files between the lightweight Python graphical user interface and a cFS Target
- Supports local and remote cFS targets

Python GUI





Release candidates (rc) are checkpoints where the development team has completed everything up to the submittal to software release processing folks for approval as an official release. Occasionally there's a week or to of finalizing artifacts and getting them all loaded after an rc is created, but it's usually fairly quick.

Note not every rc gets submitted to software release folks, but it's a version that has all the artifacts/processes/testing applied such that it could. Historically software release processing has taken up to 18 months, and could be up to 2 years from what I'm told, which is why we separate the two activities if projects do want to use the rc. It's a project choice if this software release processing (basically paperwork and "official release" designation) is value added.

I typically just use the latest RC (and occasionally advance if I need a bug fix or change that got merged).

RC's and dev cycles are more for coordinating across open source components and project needs for a checkpoint, version numbers are for impact.

In theory "breaking" changes are indicated by major version number updates (6.9.1 to 7.0.0), and there's a best-effort attempt to keep changes within a major version number backwards compatible. Note sometimes changes sneak in where using open source cFS components across minor versions or rc's does break (using Draco-rc1 osal with Draco-rc4 cfe might not actually work), but the impacts to external apps should be at most minimal. Occasionally custom config a project may be using can break if they do something unanticipated or uncovered by open source CI, but again best effort is made to keep things backwards compatible until there's a major version number update.

- **Feature Deprecation Process**
  - Mark feature as deprecated on any release
  - Provide tools/process that will warning applications when a feature is marked as deprecated
  - Only deprecate on major versions

- **User Contributions**
  - Community Contribution process and Contributor License Agreement (CLA)
- **The cFS Framework has a NASA NPR-7150.2C Class E classification**
  - Class states Design Concept, Research, Technology and General-Purpose Software
  - The cFS Framework provides artifacts to support Class B missions and a subset of artifacts to support Class A missions
  - End-users are responsible for classifying the software system that uses the cFS Framework
  - This is consistent with the Apache license's "Disclaimer of Warranty" that states, *"...provides the Work...on an "AS IS" BASIS, WITHOUT WARRANTIES OR CONDITIONS OF ANY KIND, either express or implied, including, without limitation, any warranties or conditions of ... FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE."*
- **End-users are responsible for complying with International Traffic in arms Regulations (ITAR)**

# Appendix A

## Acronyms

API	Application Programmer Interface
APL	Applied Physics Lab
ASIST	Advanced Spacecraft Integration and System Testing
ATS	Absolute Time Sequence
BC	Bus Controller
BT	Build Test
bps	bits-per seconds
Bps	Bytes-per seconds
BSP	Board Support Package
C&DH	Command and Data Handling
CCSDS	Consultative Committee for Space Data Systems
CDS	Critical Data Store
CESE	Center for Experimental Software Engineering
CFDP	CCSDS File Delivery Protocol
cFE	Core Flight Executive
cFS	Core Flight Software System
CM	Configuration Management
CMD	Command
COTS	Commercial Off The Shelf
cPCI	Compact PCI
CRC	Cyclic Redundancy Check
CS	Checksum
DMA	Direct Memory Access
DS	Data Storage
EEPROM	Electrically Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory
EOF	End of File
ES	Executive Services
EVS	Event Services
FDC	Failure Detection and Correction
FDIR	Failure Detection, Isolation, and Recovery
FM	File Management, Fault Management
FSW	Flight Software



GNC	Guidance Navigation and Control
GSFC	Goddard Space Flight Center
GOTS	Government Off The Shelf
GPM	Global Precipitation Measurement
GPS	Global Positioning System
Hi-Fi	High-Fidelity Simulation
HK	Housekeeping
HS	Health & Safety
HW	Hardware
Hz	Hertz
I&T	Integration and Test
ICD	Interface Control Document
IPP	Innovative Partnership Program Office
IRAD	Internal Research and Development
ITAR	International Traffic in Arms Regulations
ISR	Interrupt Service Routine
ITOS	Integration Test and Operations System
IV&V	Independent Verification and Validation
JHU	Johns Hopkins University
KORI	Korean Aerospace Research Institute
LADEE	Lunar Atmosphere and Dust Environment Explorer
LC	Limit Checker
LDS	Local Data Storage
LRO	Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter
Mbps	Megabits-per seconds
MD	Memory Dwell
MET	Mission Elapsed Timer
MM	Memory Manager
MS	Memory Scrub
NACK	Negative-acknowledgement
NASA	National Aeronautics Space Agency

NESC	NASA Engineering and Safety Center
NOOP	No Operation
OS	Operating System
OSAL	Operating System Abstraction Layer
PCI	Peripheral Component Interconnect
PSP	Platform Support Package
RAM	Random-Access Memory
RM	Recorder Manager
ROM	Read-Only Memory
RT	Remote Terminal
R/T	Real-time
RTOS	Real-Time Operating System
RTS	Relative Time Sequence
SARB	Software Architecture Review Board
S/C	Spacecraft
SB	Software Bus
SBC	Single-Board Computer
SC	Stored Command
SCH	Scheduler
S-COMM	S-Band Communication Card
SDO	Solar Dynamic Observatory
SDR	Spacecraft Data Recorder
SIL	Simulink Interface Layer
SpW	Spacewire
SRAM	Static RAM
SSR	Solid State Recorder
STCF	Spacecraft Time Correlation Factor
SUROM	Start-Up Read-Only Memory
SW	Software, Spacewire
TAI	International Atomic Time
TBD	To be determined

<b>TBL</b>	<b>Table Services</b>
<b>TLM</b>	<b>Telemetry</b>
<b>TDRS</b>	<b>Tracking Data Relay Satellite</b>
<b>TM</b>	<b>Time Manager</b>
<b>TO</b>	<b>Telemetry Output</b>
<b>TRMM</b>	<b>Tropical Rainfall Measuring System</b>
<b>UART</b>	<b>Universal Asynchronous Receiver/Transmitter</b>
<b>UDP</b>	<b>User Datagram Protocol</b>
<b>UMD</b>	<b>University of Maryland</b>
<b>UT</b>	<b>Unit Test</b>
<b>UTC</b>	<b>Coordinated Universal Time</b>
<b>VCDU</b>	<b>Virtual Channel Data Unit</b>
<b>XB</b>	<b>External Bus</b>
<b>XBI</b>	<b>Instrument 1553 External Bus</b>
<b>XBS</b>	<b>Spacecraft 1553 External Bus</b>

# Appendix B

## cFS Architectural Goals

- 1. Reduce time to deploy high quality flight software**
- 2. Reduce project schedule and cost uncertainty**
- 3. Directly facilitate formalized software reuse**
- 4. Enable collaboration across organizations**
- 5. Simplify sustaining engineering (On-Orbit FSW modifications) for long duration missions**
- 6. Scale from small instruments to Hubble class missions**
- 7. Build a platform for advanced concepts and prototyping**
- 8. Create common standards and tools across the center**



- **Operability**
  - The architecture must enable the flight system to operate in an efficient and understandable way
- **Reliability**
  - The architecture implementation must be known to behave correctly in nominal and expected off-nominal situations
- **Robustness**
  - The architecture implementation must be predictable and safe in the presence of unexpected conditions
- **Performance**
  - The architecture implementation must efficient in runtime resources given the targeted processing environments
- **Testability**
  - The architecture implementation must be easily and comprehensively testable in situ in flight like scenarios
- **Maintainability**
  - The architecture implementation must be maintainable in the operational environment

- **Effective Reuse**

- The architecture must support an effective reuse approach. This includes the software and artifacts. Requirements, design, code, review presentations, test, operations guides, command and telemetry databases. The goal is to achieve 100% reuse of a software component with no code changes

- **Composability**

- Properties established at the component level, such as interfaces, timeliness or testability, also hold at the system level. For an application or node to be composable the architecture and process must support:
  - Independent development of nodes
  - Integration of the node into a system should not invalidate services in the value and temporal domains
  - Integration of an additional node into a functioning system should not disturb the correct operation of the existing nodes
  - Replica determinism – identical copies of nodes must produce identical results in an identical order, within a specified time interval

- **Predicable Development Schedule**

- Development estimates provided by the FSW team should be reliable

- **Scalability**
  - The FSW must scale with mission requirements. (Example: instruments or subsystem processor may only need a small amount of message buffer space. This should be configurable to avoid wasting memory resources)
- **Adaptability**
  - The FSW must be capable of supporting a range of platforms and missions
- **Minimized Development Cost**
  - Costs for mission functions should be as low as possible. The teams must consider the difference between NRE and costs for a given mission
- **Technology infusion**
  - The FSW should support the infusion of new hardware and software technologies with minimal side effects

# Appendix C

## Online Resources



- cFE Framework, <http://github.com/nasa/cFE>
  - Contains the OSALs, PSPs and cFE that are managed and released by the NASA CCB
- cFS Bundle (cFE Framework), <http://github.com/nasa/cFS>
  - Contains the cFE Framework packaged with additional components to create a system that can be built, run and unit tested on a Linux platform
  - Website also contains a list of apps, tools and distributions
    - Other components may exist
- cFS Apps, [https://github.com/nasa/\\*\\*](https://github.com/nasa/**)
  - “\*\*” is the app abbreviation such as FM for File Manager
- cFS External Code Interface (ECI) library, <https://github.com/nasa/ECI>



- cFS Basecamp, <https://github.com/cfs-tools/cfs-basecamp>
- cFS Basecamp App Repositories, <https://github.com/cfs-apps>
- cFE EDS Framework Toolchain, <https://github.com/jphickey/cfe-eds-framework>
- Open Mission Stack FSW Learning Resources, <https://openmissionstack.com/>
- YouTube Educational Videos, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2wfvAlkrrgyC4ITwL3zokg>
- OpenSatKit, <https://github.com/OpenSatKit/OpenSatKit/wiki>
  - Combines cFS, COSMOS Ground System, <https://cosmosrb.com/>, and NASA 42 Simulator, <https://github.com/ericstoneking/42>
  - Nolonger supported