

Satellite Tasking Protocol

1. Purpose and governing logic

This protocol governs how satellite tasking requests are submitted, evaluated, prioritized, and executed for the Common Space constellation. It applies from the moment a request is submitted through to image delivery and post-release transparency obligations. The protocol is built on our organizing principles.

Proactive tasking will complement community-submitted requests by ensuring the satellite is already collecting imagery where it is most likely to be needed. Using automated tipping and cueing from trusted signals, such as disaster alerts, SAR vessel detections, AIS anomalies, wildfire hotspots, flood forecasts, and other public-interest data streams, the system can recommend or initiate collections before an explicit request is made. Our operations team will also proactively task imagery ahead of anticipated events and emerging crises, reducing delays when timely information is critical. To maintain transparency and build trust, all proactive collections, including their rationale, status, and resulting imagery, will be visible to the community through our tasking interface, allowing members to see what is being collected, why it was prioritized, and how it aligns with broader community needs.

There are two recognized community requester pathways. Each must pass purpose, harm, misuse, dual-use, and affected community sensitivity checks before tasking or data release.

Pathway	Who	Request route	Request urgency
Member	Any organization that has completed Common Space membership: vetting, signed terms, and activated credentials. Includes humanitarian, research, civil society, and commercial members.	Common Space website. Credentials pre-validated.	Emergency, urgent and standard-level requests.
Public interest fast-track	Any civil society or public interest organization that is yet to become a Common Space member.	Common Space website. One-time identity verification only.	Must be for emergency-level requests. Urgent or standard requests cannot be fast tracked; those requesters will be encouraged to become members.

2. Who can task

2.1 Members

A member is any individual or organization that has completed the Common Space membership process: vetting and screening, acceptance of our terms of use, and activation of a member credential. Common Space records who the member is, what they do, and what they have agreed to. Each member organization can authorize individuals who can submit tasking requests – these requests are pre-vetted and can be accelerated through the process.

Member organizations span two categories:

Member category	Examples	Notes
Public Interest	Non-profits, universities, multilaterals, civil governments, civil society, independent journalists	Can submit tasking requests.
Commercial	For-profit entities including insurance, agriculture technology, logistics, climate analytics, software companies, for-profit media organizations	Cannot submit tasking requests or influence other members to task on their behalf.

2.2 Public interest fast-track

If a public interest organization has not become a member yet, they may request tasking and/or data access through the public interest fast-track process as a one-time, temporary allowance. **Their institutional identity and accountability are already established through their legal mandate and international standing.**

Fast-track eligibility covers:

- Public sector organizations who have not yet had a chance to become members but who need to task the satellite for an emergency and/or need access to existing data quickly.
- If an organization wants a more routine request that is not time-sensitive, they will be shepherded through the membership process.
- Organizations who go the fast-track route will still be encouraged to become members. Data access is time-limited under this emergency exception.

2.3 Prohibited requesters

The following categories may not task Common Space satellites under any pathway, including as a named beneficiary of a member's proxy submission:

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- Military forces, armed groups, and private military or security companies
 - Intelligence agencies and national security bodies or known contractors of these groups
 - Any entity subject to UN Security Council or World Bank sanctions
 - Any entity subject to widely recognized sanctions, ICC arrest warrants, and/or Interpol's most wanted list
 - Organizations or individuals designated as extremist or terrorist by the UN or governments
 - Extractive industries seeking imagery for resource extraction, land acquisition, or supply chain surveillance without a demonstrable public-interest justification reviewed and approved by Common Space
 - Organizations engaged in gambling, pornography, and organizations employing prisoners, or organizations engaged in any domestic or international criminal activity
 - Industries that produce or sell products and services that could cause adverse, or negative, impacts resulting in, but not limited to, human rights violations, environmental damage.

Prohibition applies regardless of the stated purpose of a specific request. A prohibited actor cannot gain access by framing a request as humanitarian. If Common Space discovers that a prohibited actor has obtained imagery through misrepresentation, including through a member intermediary who failed to disclose the true requester, access for the member intermediary will be suspended pending review.

3. Submitting a tasking request

3.1 Required information

Every tasking request whether from a member or a public interest fast-track requester must include the following at submission:

Field	What is required
Area of interest	Geometry of the target area (polygon, bounding box, or named place with sufficient precision). Maximum AOI size is subject to capacity constraints — see Section 6.
Purpose	Plain-language description of the intended use (150 words maximum). Be specific: "flood damage assessment for displacement tracking" is more useful than "disaster response." Do you have plans to share or publish the imagery?
Scope	The requested revisit or coverage within the area of interest and by when (last useful date of collection).
Data Users	Who (names of individuals or organizations) will be using the data for this purpose (including any other person/organization who will receive, analyze, or publish the imagery)?
Data Collections	What cloud cover, off-nadir, and ground sample distance are within acceptable range for this request? (Common Space has default parameters for each).
Urgency	Select one: Emergency (life-safety situation, requires response within hours) / Urgent (time-sensitive but not immediately life-threatening, requires response within 72 hours) / Standard (no acute time pressure).
Beneficiaries	Who will benefit from this imagery, and approximately how many people are affected or served.
Requester identity	Member credential (auto-populated for members) or, for fast-track, the name of the requestor, their organization, and contact information/email address. Are they connected to an existing member? Does the requester come from the affected community? And/or have affected communities been consulted about this request?
Sensitivity	Is this a sensitive request? yes/no (determines whether the request is published in our tasking backlog) and why. See section 3.2.

3.2 Additional information for sensitive requests

If the request involves any of the following, the requester must review a list of specific concerns (e.g., team in active conflict zone, persecuted or at-risk communities, legal investigations, transboundary disputes, etc) and select any that apply to provide a better understanding of the risk associated and justify not publishing the request. If any concerns apply, they must also provide a brief additional statement (100 words maximum) to further explain the circumstances and sensitivities.

3.3 What happens after submission

Every request receives an automated acknowledgment within 15 minutes containing a tracking ID and an expected timeline based on urgency level and current queue status. Requesters can check status at any time using the tracking ID. Acknowledgment of receipt is not approval.

4. Review and approval process

Every request passes through the following steps in sequence. Fast-track requests move through the same steps but with compressed timelines and, where criteria are clearly met, automated decision gates.

1 Identity check – initial approval

For members: identity is confirmed by the individual's credential, associated to an organization in many cases. No additional check required unless the credential is flagged for anomalous activity. These requests are approved and enter the scheduling queue.

For the public interest fast-track: Common Space verifies the identity of the requester and the legal standing of the affiliated organization. This is automated. If the check cannot be completed automatically, a staff member contacts the submitter directly. Target turnaround: 2 hours.

If identity cannot be verified, the request is held but not declined. The requester is notified and given 5 business days to provide clarifying information before the request lapses.

2 Do no harm check

The Common Space satellite operations team will conduct a ‘do no harm’ check on all tasking requests for potential misuse, sensitivities, and alignment with our purpose and values. At this stage, requests are either approved and sent to scheduling or denied with an explanation sent back to the requester.

3 Urgency and scheduling

Once approved, requests flagged as emergencies or urgent are prioritized above standard or routine monitoring requests. Emergencies or AOIs with multiple requests will be further prioritized. The queue position is determined by the prioritization rules in Section 6.

Approved requesters receive a confirmation with:

- Confirmed status/priority/number of attempts
- Estimated pass window (date range, not exact time)
- AOI (covering the requested area)
- Expected delivery timeline after pass

Scheduling is conditional on satellite capacity being available for the identified pass window. If capacity is not available, the request is deferred (not declined) and the requester is notified with a revised estimate. See Section 6 for capacity allocation rules.

A requester may cancel a pending or scheduled tasking request any time before capture begins, and the freed capacity is returned to the queue and reallocated. Common Space may also cancel a request unilaterally if the underlying justification lapses (e.g., an emergency is declared resolved, a search is called off) or if a higher-priority need displaces it. In the latter case the original requester is notified and offered first right of refusal on the next available window. Cancellations are logged in the audit trail.

5. Prioritization and capacity

5.1 Emergency escalation

A request flagged as “Emergency” by the requester and confirmed as such by Common Space staff is immediately elevated above all other queue positions. Emergency status is reserved for time-critical situations where delaying imagery acquisition would likely reduce its ability to protect civilian life, support humanitarian operations, preserve evidence of

serious human rights abuses, or inform urgent public safety decisions. Some examples of scenarios warranting emergency priority in tasking:

- Active, acute threat to civilian life in the area of interest (e.g., disaster, conflict-related displacement, infrastructure failure with life-safety implications), including imminent extreme weather events where pre-event imagery is needed.
- Protected site under active attack (hospital, school, cultural heritage). Common Space considers risk to civilian life, time sensitivity, potential humanitarian operational benefit, international law, irreplaceability of the site or evidence, to name a few areas.
- Rapid-onset displacement requiring imagery to guide humanitarian operations within 48 hours.
- Credible reports of mass atrocity or widespread human rights violations requiring rapid documentation or preservation of evidence (e.g., mass killings, village burnings, ethnic cleansing, unlawful demolitions, protests with known crackdowns and/or within authoritarian regimes).
- Acute public health emergencies where imagery is needed to support life-saving responses (e.g., epidemic response, major disease outbreak affecting access, collapse of critical health infrastructure, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive events).
- Search and rescue or missing persons operations where timely imagery could materially improve the likelihood of locating survivors.
- Official request from a recognized humanitarian coordination mechanism (e.g., UN OCHA, national emergency management agency, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement) indicating that imagery is needed for an active emergency response.
- Other exceptional circumstances where Common Space determines that delaying collection would likely result in the loss of critical, time-sensitive information needed to protect civilian life or enable humanitarian action.

5.2 Standard prioritization

Among non-emergency requests, queue position is determined by a weighted score across the following criteria. Scoring is done by staff using a standardized rubric. Assessments are used internally to improve prioritization scoring and are summarized (without identifying detail) in the annual impact report. They are not published individually.

Criterion	What is assessed	Weight
Severity of need	How serious is the harm being addressed or prevented?	High
Population affected	How many people benefit from this imagery?	High
Time sensitivity	Does delayed imagery significantly reduce its value?	High

Underserved region	Is this an area chronically under-imaged by commercial providers?	High
Local or community requester	Is the request from or directly serving a local organization in the affected area?	Medium
Alternative data availability	Is this information genuinely unavailable from open sources?	Low
Feasibility	How possible is it for Common Space to get this collection based on expected passes, weather, area to cover, etc?	Low

5.3 Capacity allocation rules

When satellite capacity is constrained, requests are allocated in the following order.

1. Emergency requests, includes fast-track requests
2. Urgent requests, includes fast-track requests
3. Routine Monitoring collections requested from community (see Section 7)
4. Routine monitoring collections which are proactively identified (see Section 7)

If capacity is exhausted and a new high-priority request arrives, the lowest-priority confirmed request in the current schedule is deferred. The deferred requester is notified immediately with a revised window.

6. Routine Monitoring

Common Space reserves a portion of constellation capacity for proactive, recurring monitoring of areas with chronic humanitarian or environmental needs. This supports our mission to serve the world's most vulnerable and to be proactively collecting imagery over high need areas. These collections will support change detection, anticipatory action, community mapping, resilience planning and more.

6.1 Purpose

Reactive tasking alone leaves predictable gaps. There are chronic conflict zones, climate-vulnerable regions, and under-imaged populations that are known priorities for humanitarian action. Proactive monitoring addresses this by creating a collection plan that integrates high-need areas with less urgent community requests.

6.2 Capacity allocation

Our approach is to fill the collection capacity with proactive monitoring and community requests which can be deprioritized by incoming emergency and urgent requests.

6.3 Area selection

Monitoring areas are selected by a committee convened monthly with ongoing community consultation. An area is removed from the collections planning if the conditions that justified inclusion no longer apply or if continued tasking is assessed to create more risk than benefit.

Examples of areas for routine monitoring:

- Chronic conflict with documented civilian impact, rated persistent on Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) or equivalent
- Disaster affected regions with limited existing monitoring
- Climate vulnerability index (e.g., via the U.S. Climate Vulnerability Index or the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative) above a defined threshold in an area with limited existing monitoring
- Documented pattern of under-imaging relative to population and need
- Cities, especially those with informal settlements
- Refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or informal settlements

6.4 Time-bound

Every routine tasking request is still time-bound and approved for a defined window (e.g., 3, 6, or 12 months) rather than granted as a standing, indefinite claim on the satellite. Each site also gets a capped number of collections within that window, so one community's routine

task can't quietly grow into a de facto dedicated feed that crowds out everyone else. At the end of the window, the requestor can submit a renewal, which serves as a checkpoint on whether the cadence still matches the need, the data's actually being used, and if we should continue to dedicate capacity.

7. Tasking decisions and requester communications

7.1 Tasking decision outcomes

Decision	When it applies	What the requester receives
Approved	Request passes purpose, identity, and risk checks and capacity is available. Safeguards for sensitive areas or high-risk requests.	Confirmation with pass window estimate, delivery timeline, and any safeguards to be applied.
Approved — deferred	Request is approved but satellite capacity is not currently available.	Confirmation of approval, explanation of deferral, revised scheduling estimate, and place in queue.
Held — information needed	Request cannot be assessed because identity verification is incomplete or required information is missing.	Specific list of what is needed. Requester has 5 business days to respond before the request lapses.
Declined — purpose	Stated purpose does not fall within allowed categories. This could include a lack of local support.	Category-level explanation. Requesters may resubmit with a corrected purpose statement.
Declined — eligibility	Requester is a prohibited actor or cannot be verified as a permitted one.	Notice of ineligibility. No detailed explanation of which check failed.

7.2 Communication timeline commitments

Urgency / pathway	Review target	Notes
Emergency - member submitted	< 2 hours	Automated approval. Staff review in parallel.
Emergency - fast track	< 2 – 4 hours	Requester vetting in parallel to request review.
Urgent	< 24 hours	
Standard	5 business days	

7.3 Transparency dashboard

Common Space maintains a public transparency dashboard updated monthly. The dashboard publishes, in aggregate:

- Total tasking requests received, by month
- Requests approved, deferred, declined, and held by category and geography
- Average time from request received to image delivery
- Emergency requests: count and AOI region (not precise location)
- Routine monitoring areas currently active (less any sensitive areas)
- Number of people impacted across these areas

The dashboard does not publish: requester identities, specific AOI coordinates for restricted or embargoed imagery, or details on sensitive requests or reported misuse.

7.4 Post-delivery: audit trail and revocation

Delivery is not the end of Common Space's obligation. Every tasking request, approval, and delivery is logged in an immutable audit trail (requester, AOI, purpose, approving reviewer, delivery timestamp), retained for the life of the membership relationship and available to the governance task force on request. This is the record that makes the rest of this section enforceable.

If misuse is reported or detected independently (e.g., through outcome-note review, transparency-dashboard anomalies, or a third-party complaint) Common Space may:

- Suspend the requester's tasking privileges immediately, pending review, without waiting for a full investigation to conclude
- Investigate within 30 days, drawing on the audit trail and any available downstream evidence
- Revoke membership or tasking access permanently where misuse is substantiated, with the outcome and (non-identifying) reason logged in the transparency dashboard
- Reinstate access if the report doesn't hold up, with the suspension period and reason for reinstatement likewise logged

7.4 Complaints and appeals

A requester who disagrees with a tasking decision (e.g., decline, hold, prioritization outcome, or a suspension/revocation) may appeal it. This section covers what's specific to tasking; the full complaints process (intake, investigation standards, timelines, and escalation) is governed by **Common Space's Complaints Policy**, which this section defers to.

- Who can appeal: the requester of record for the tasking decision being contested

- What can be appealed: declines, holds, prioritization, and access suspension/revocation under 7.3. Emergency-pathway approvals are not appealable by third parties, since they're time-critical and automated, but you can file a complaint.
- Filing window: 30 days from notification of the decision
- Review: escalates to a reviewer who was not part of the original decision. For revocations, this means the appeal is heard separately from whoever substantiated the misuse finding
- Status during appeal: a suspension under 7.3 remains in effect while the appeal is pending, unless the task force grants an interim stay
- Outcome: decision upheld, reversed, or modified, communicated to the requester with reasoning; outcome logged in the audit trail per 7.3

8.1 Tasking Committee

Common Space convenes a **Tasking Working Group**, comprised of rotating member representatives drawn from across our user communities plus one non-voting staff liaison. The Tasking Working Group is responsible for:

- Site nominations: reviewing and approving which areas of interest (e.g., cities, camps, coastlines, and farms) qualify for routine coverage, and setting the cadence and collection cap for each
- Periodic reassessment: revisiting active monitoring sites on a set cycle (proposed: every 6 months) to confirm continued relevance, retire sites no longer needed, and return that capacity to the general pool
- Dispute resolution: adjudicating cadence or cap disagreements that a single reviewer can't resolve alone before anything escalates to a formal appeal
- Transparency: publishing a brief rationale for each addition or removal to the public dashboard, withholding precise coordinates where a site carries a sensitivity flag

9. Open questions

The following items require decisions before this protocol can be operationalized.

#	Question	Decision needed
1	Emergency authority	Who at Common Space can confirm emergency escalation outside business hours? Is there a 24/7 on-call function (ideally distributed regionally)?