

Puerto Rican engineer Orlando Figueroa receives prestigious award for NASA work ^[1]

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From [Partnership for Public Service](#) ^[2] explaining Dr. Figueroa's contribution to MER project: "In 2001, Orlando Figueroa was asked to take over the reins of NASA's efforts to reach Mars, and the Mars Exploration Rover project was on its way. The MER mission was designed to search for evidence of the role of liquid water in the geologic history of Mars by examining rocks and soils using a mobile laboratory. This endeavor has been extraordinarily successful in meeting this goal, clearly showing evidence of ancient water and helping to re-write our knowledge of the planet. In approximately 400 days of science-driven surface operations, these roving vehicles have produced a wealth of scientific discoveries far beyond original expectations, revealing aspects of Mars as a potential habitat that were previously unknown. And for the first time in history, a mobile science laboratory has been used to conduct remote exploration on the surface of another planet, penetrating regions beyond the original landing site. Without the contributions and leadership of Mr. Figueroa, these missions could not have been accomplished in the brief three-year development period. He led the activity through its accelerated development and managed an outstanding team of people at NASA headquarters, NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the academic community."

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