Robust systems for accessing the subsurface of the Moon and Mars are critical to the next generation of robotic explorers. Limited spacecraft resources (power, volume, mass, computational capabilities, and telemetry bandwidth) demand innovative, integrated sampling systems that can survive and operate in challenging environments (extremes in temperature, pressure, gravity, vibration and thermal cycling).

Research should be conducted to develop compact, low-power, lightweight subsurface sampling systems with access to depths of 1 - 3 m below the surface. A relevant mission scenario for this type of drill would include drilling multiple holes from a mobile platform, such as a rover. For reference, current Mars-relevant rovers range in mass from 200 - 800 kg.

Consideration should be given to potential failure scenarios for integrated systems. For example, recovery and mitigation techniques for platform slip and borehole misalignment should be addressed. Significant attention should be given to the sensing and automation required for real-time control, fault diagnosis and recovery. Additional areas of interest include understanding the limitations of dry drilling into mixed media, including icy mixtures of rock and regolith.

Also of particular need are means of acquiring subsurface rock and regolith samples with minimum contamination. This contamination may include contaminants brought to the sample by the drill itself, material from one stratigraphic layer contaminating samples collected at another depth (sample cross-contamination), or Earth-source microbes brought to the Martian surface prior to drilling (‘clean’ sampling from a ‘dirty’ surface).