

**2008 NATIONAL SURVEY OF RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES (NSRCG)
MONETARY INCENTIVE SUPPLEMENT PLAN
FOR SCHOOLS REQUIRING SPECIAL HANDLING**

This proposal requests a supplement to the incentive plan for the 2008 NSRCG for two schools requiring special handling. The two schools had agreed to participate in the NSRCG and provided sampling information but decided not to release personally identifying contact information of their sampled graduates needed for the NSRCG contractor to mail questionnaires and conduct non-response follow-up. As an alternative to releasing personally identifying information, these schools have agreed to mail the NSRCG questionnaires to their graduates directly.

Together, the two schools account for 149 of the 18,000 graduates in the 2008 NSRCG sample. NSF is committed to these schools' continued participation in the NSRCG, and is therefore requesting OMB approval of a special incentive supplement included in an initial survey mailing and limited follow-up mail contact to encourage their graduates to participate in the NSRCG.

Description of Incentive Supplement Plan

Given that the contractor will have no direct contact with the graduates, and consequently no way to encourage their participation, NSF is requesting that the 149 graduates of these two schools be offered a monetary incentive for their participation in the NSRCG. Based on our previous consultation on the type of incentive to be used, we will follow OMB's instruction to provide a prepaid \$10 incentive with the initial survey mailing and offer a \$30 incentive upon respondent's completion of the survey.

Procedural details will be finalized on a school-by-school basis, but NSF plans the following protocols for making contacts with these sampled graduates. The schools will be requested to strictly adhere to the mailing instructions provided by the NSRCG contractor. The mailing instructions will focus on the schools generating and affixing correct name/address labels for NSRCG identification that link to the each corresponding graduate. In addition, the NSRCG contractor will work with the schools to ensure:

- The school mails a sealed survey invitation packet (provided by the NSRCG contractor) using the university's business envelope to their graduates with a cover letter signed (preferably) by the president of the school.
- The sealed packet is from NSF and contains an invitation to participate in the NSRCG, a \$10 check payable to 'Cash', a hard copy questionnaire, and pre-addressed postage paid return envelope. The NSF cover letter offers an additional \$30 incentive for completing the survey either on the web or returning the questionnaire by mail. The questionnaire return envelope is addressed directly to the NSRCG contractor, so the schools never see the individual responses or even know who has responded.
- Each school re-mails any survey mailings returned to them as undeliverable with a new address.

- If the school agrees to help with additional follow-up contacts, a second sealed survey invitation packet with a NSF cover letter will be mailed to *all* sampled graduates about six weeks after the initial survey mailing. Mailing to all sampled graduates ensures that the school does not know which of their graduates responded to the survey and which have not. The second survey packet contains another copy of questionnaire and return envelope addressed directly to the NSRCG contractor so the non-responding graduates will have an option to respond via web or hard copy questionnaire again. In this second packet, the NSF letter is a “thank you/reminder” format, thanking all responding graduates for their participation and asking them to contact the NSRCG contractor if they have not received the \$30 incentive check in the mail. The letter also serves as a reminder of the incentive offer to participate in the study to all non-responding graduates.

NSF had initially proposed offering a \$50 postpaid incentive to ensure representation of these graduates in spite of the limited opportunity to follow-up with those who are survey non-responders. A postpaid incentive was proposed rather than a prepaid incentive to avoid the problems of incentive checks being cashed by someone other than the sample member or by a non-responding sample member. To address concern about possible mishandling of checks made out to “Cash” by school staff, the survey materials including the \$10 check will be sent to the schools in a sealed envelope.

The monetary incentive is needed to maximize responses from these NSRCG sample members who are subject to minimal survey contacts. These graduates will have only one or two opportunities to respond to the survey, unlike other NSRCG sample members who receive a pre-notification letter, two questionnaires/invitations to respond by web, a reminder/thank you letter, e-mail reminders, and a series of telephone follow up calls, as well as early address updating and intense locating of out-of-date addresses and telephone numbers.

Response rates in the past for sampled graduates from schools that have participated in the NSRCG using the same type of special handling without incentive offers have been extremely low. In 2006, the unweighted survey response rate from one school that did not provide graduates’ contact information but did conduct a single mailing with no incentive was 15.2 percent compared to an overall unweighted survey response rate of 68.6 percent. Similarly, in 2003, another school conducted one survey mailing that resulted in a 30 percent response rate. Because similar procedures with no incentive have resulted in relatively high unit nonresponse and potential non-response bias, NSF would like to request OMB approval of the proposed incentive supplement. This special incentive offer will increase the likelihood that graduates of schools with strict privacy policies are well-represented in the 2008 NSRCG.