

MEMORANDUM

June 27, 2011

To: Shelly Martinez, Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

From: Lynda T. Carlson, Director
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics

Via: Suzanne Plimpton, Clearance Officer
National Science Foundation

Subject: Notification of information collection under generic clearance

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you that the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) plans to conduct cognitive interviews under the generic clearance for survey improvement projects (OMB number 3145-0174). This activity is associated with the Early Career Doctorates Project (ECD).

Background

The NCSES is gathering more information about early career doctorates (ECDs) including postdoctoral researchers (postdocs) and other doctorate-holding nonfaculty researchers who have received science, engineering, and health doctorates in the last ten years. As a result of research conducted to date, NSF is developing a survey for ECDs in three settings: (1) institutions that participate in the National Science Foundation/National Institutes of Health (NIH) Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering (GSS), (2) Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs), and (3) NIH intramural research programs. In this stage of the project, the primary goal of the methodological research for the ECD is to determine the best approach for listing, sampling, contacting, and surveying within these three settings.

For this request, the NSF wants to conduct cognitive interviews with a sample of ECDs to include postdocs, faculty, and nonfaculty researchers in the GSS. The objectives of the cognitive interviews will be to determine the most effective ways to contact ECDs to encourage their participation, to obtain feedback on methods for providing login credentials and to access to the web survey. The results will inform the contact strategies used for the proposed data collection.

To accomplish this work, the NCSES will enlist the services of Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International.

Proposed Methodology

There will be up to 16 individual cognitive interviews conducted with ECDs, each lasting approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours. Each interview will be slightly different, and topics include:

- factors that influence participation,
- ECDs use of and management of mail and email,
- influence of institutional appeal,
- preferred mode of administration,
- accessing the web survey,
- email subject lines and email messages,
- “splash” page where ECD requests log in credentials to be issued, and
- entry to web survey.

Participants will be recruited from the GSS-eligible institutions with respect to position (postdoc, faculty and doctorate-holding nonfaculty researchers), origin of doctorate degree (U.S. versus foreign), and field of degree. Given the availability of ECDs meeting these criteria and to minimize cost, we will recruit from several institutions within driving distance of RTI International’s campus.

The recruitment strategy will include flyers and email announcements to inform ECDs about the goals of the project, the purpose of the cognitive interviews, and the \$50 incentive to be provided at the completion of the interview. Flyers will be posted on accessible bulletin boards in locations likely to be visited by ECDs such as the postdoc association office, research centers and international association offices. In addition, email announcements will be sent to the postdoc association, research institute and faculty listservs with the permission of the listservs’ moderators. Potential participants will be asked to reply by email or telephone to obtain information that will determine eligibility. During the eligibility screening contact, potential participants will be informed of their confidentiality rights and our plans to audiotape the interview. The recruiting materials, including the flyer and email announcement, are provided in Attachment A.

The cognitive interviews will be conducted at RTI International’s main campus. At the start of each interview, participants will be verbally reminded of their rights to decline participation, that they may end the interview at any time, and that they may choose not to answer any question. In addition, they will be given a consent form to read and sign if they choose to participate. The consent form (refer to Attachment B.1) will explain the following: the intention to have a note taker present to allow the facilitator to focus entirely on the discussion and that the results of the interview will be summarized; the desire to audiotape interviews for later review when details not found in the notes are needed; and participants will be informed that NSF may wish to listen to the interviews for firsthand knowledge of participants’ responses.

Proposed Protocol

The protocol is designed to gather feedback on factors that influence participation including an appeal from an institution official, ECDs use of and management of campus mail and email, preferred mode of administration, evaluation of contacting materials and web survey screens, and usability testing of the process of issuing login credentials.

The proposed protocol and related materials are provided in Attachment B.

Burden Information

We estimated the total recruitment burden to be 500 minutes or approximately 8 ½ hours (50 potential participants with each projected to take between 5 to 10 minutes to respond to the recruitment announcement).

There will be up to 16 individual cognitive interviews, each projected to be 1 ½ to 2 hours long. Thus, the maximum total burden for the proposed cognitive interviews is 32 hours (16 participants x 2 hours per interview). There will be a maximum of 16 cognitive interviews, including those who choose to terminate the interviews early.

The total burden (recruitment and cognitive interviews) is estimated to be 40 ½ hours.

Incentive Payments

To attract a diverse set of participants from this population of busy, educated, relatively highly compensated individuals, cognitive interview participants will receive \$50 as compensation for their time for the 90 – 120 minute interview.

Contact Information

The contact person for questions regarding this research is:

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