

## Nonprofit R&D Exploratory Interview Protocol

### I. Introductions and Background Information (ICF and NSF representative)

Thank you for meeting with us today. We'd like to introduce ourselves and provide some background.

[ICF and NSF staff introduce themselves – name, organization, and role in this interview followed by NPO introductions. (Offer business cards. Be sure to get names and titles/possibly business cards.)]

We'd like to talk to you today about ideas for a new survey of nonprofit organizations. We will get into the details on what the survey will cover in a few minutes, but we'd like to start more generally about the type of work you all do.

NSF is contracting with ICF International to help with this new survey. We are visiting about 20 nonprofits before we begin drafting a survey questionnaire. Before we begin, I would like to note a few things:

- Your participation in this discussion is voluntary.
- The information you give us today will not be associated with your name or the name of your organization.
- We like to audio record our interviews so that we have all your comments. Is that okay with you/everyone?

[If Yes: ] I have a consent form for you to sign. [Distribute form]

*If anyone does not give permission to audio record the interview, please do not tape the meeting. Verify that it's okay for <insert name> to take notes.*

*Collect signed consent forms.*

Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

## II. Background about NPO

I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about your organization.

1. What sort of work does < NPO name> do? What were the major activities over the last year?

[Probe as needed:] Has the staff at <NPO name> done any of the following?

- a. Conducted work that might lead to a patent? [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
  - b. Produced findings that are published in academic journals or presented at conferences? [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
  - c. Applied scholarly or creative activity in a way that has never been done before? [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
  - d. Created new solutions that can be generalized to other situations? [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
  - e. Conducted work to discover previously unknown facts, structures, or relationships. [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
  - f. Conducted work to extend the understanding of facts, relationships or principles in ways that could be useful to others? [If yes] can you tell me more about this work?
2. Thanks, that's very helpful. Could you also tell us a little about how <name of NPO> is organized?

Probes

- How many locations do you have?
- How is the leadership organized?

[If no R&D activities mentioned, skip to Section VIII (Survey Entrance into Organization)]

## III. Defining Research and Development (ask only for NPOs who have R&D activities)

Within the National Science Foundation, the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics is responsible for collecting data on U.S. science and engineering activities, including data on funding and spending for research and development (R&D).

3. What comes to mind when you hear the term, "R&D," or research and development?
4. Does your organization routinely use these terms to describe some of your activities that we just discussed? Are there other words or phrases your organization uses instead of "R&D"? Can you tell me more about that?

5. Are “research” and “development” the same, or are they different? Can you tell me more about that?
6. Can you give me some examples of projects your organization would consider to be “research” and “development”, if you use these terms? There are no right or wrong answers here, we are just trying to understand how different organizations define and categorize these activities.
7. Do you have divisions whose work is specifically R&D related or is R&D taking place throughout the organization?
8. Do all of your R&D staff report to a central office or person? Or are they dispersed among the various areas/divisions/locations?

#### **IV. Sponsoring research at other organizations**

Now we’d like to get into more specifics on <NPO name’s> involvement in R&D-type activities – (as needed) what you call [fill in the blank with respondent’s words].

9. Does your organization ever work with other organizations on this type of work? What do you call those sorts of arrangements? Can you give me some examples?
10. Do you fund any R&D that is conducted by others?  
If “NO” -- skip next question  
If “YES” – continue with next question
11. [As needed:] Do you fund R&D conducted by ...
  - other nonprofits?
  - universities or colleges?
  - any private companies?
  - any federal, state, or local government agencies?
  - any other types of organizations?

Probe as needed: Hospitals? Museums? School Districts? Anything else?

12. Do you support R&D in any other ways besides funding? [IF YES:] Could you tell me more about that?
- a. Do you contribute staff to R&D work being done at other organizations? (Probe for details)
  - b. Do you let others use your facilities for R&D? (Probe for details)

**V. Sources of R&D Funding**

Now, I'd like to talk with you about the R&D that your organization conducts and who pays for the R&D.

13. Does your organization conduct R&D using its own funds?
- a. [If yes] What are the primary types of research projects your organization funds?
  - b. [If yes] How or from where do you obtain your funds used to conduct R&D?
14. Do you conduct or fund research training for your staff?
15. Does your organization get external funding for any of your R&D projects (Federal or non-Federal)?

Probe: Do you get funds from:

- U.S. Federal government
- State & local government
- U. S. Businesses or Corporations
- Other NPOs (e.g., American Red Cross, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)
- Internal funds
- Foreign governments
- Other Foreign Businesses or other Organizations
- Private donors
- Other sources

16. Do you have any R&D being conducted at your organization by affiliated researchers (from universities or other hospitals and institutes)? If yes, can you tell me more about that?
17. Do you partner with organizations or individuals external to your NPO to jointly conduct R&D activities? [Note: *this should not include just the provision of funding for the other organization to do the work.*] [If yes] Can you tell me more about these activities?
- a. Do you give any subawards or subcontracts to other organizations to provide assistance on your R&D projects?

- b. Is your organization a subcontractor or subawardee on any R&D projects with other universities, hospitals, or other organizations?
  
18. [For medical-related NPOS only]: Does your organization conduct or sponsor clinical trials to test the effect of drugs, medical devices, tests, treatments, or other therapies for patients?
  - a. [If yes] can you tell me more about how these trials are conducted?
  - b. [If yes] Are they conducted by your organization or do you fund the trials conducted in outside locations?
  - c. [As applicable] Do you include these trials in your organization's definition of R&D?

## **VI. Recordkeeping**

Next, I'd like to focus our discussion on your financial recordkeeping processes and how they might be used to provide information for an R&D survey. We are not looking for specific details or dollar amounts. We're trying to find out what might be possible to ask consistently across a variety of nonprofit organizations.

19. For your own purposes, do you systematically keep any kind of records on R&D performed or funded by <NPO name>?
  
20. Are you familiar with any tax, regulatory, or reporting requirements for tracking R&D activities by your organization? [If yes], what are they?
  
21. When does your organization's fiscal year end? About how long does it typically take to close out each year's books?
  
22. In your financial records, are you able to separately identify spending on R&D activities versus spending for other activities?
  - [If yes, proceed with probes below]
  - [If no, have an open ended discussion on how they code their activities in their accounting system and how they might go about identifying research and development projects]
  - a. Do you have a way of accounting for the portion of employee salaries devoted to R&D activities? Can you tell me more about that? Are there any staff working on R&D who would not be included in this accounting (i.e. not paid through your organization's books)?
  
  - b. [If there is R&D performance in multiple locations, ask:] Do you track R&D funds by location or division?

- c. Earlier we talked about some of the sources of your R&D funds. Do you keep records of your expenditures from each source? Can you tell me more about that?
- d. [If joint projects or affiliations are mentioned in question 17] How are the expenditures for joint projects handled? i.e. do they show up in your accounting system or the affiliate's, or both?
- e. [If subawards are mentioned] Are you able to separately identify the R&D funding provided to your subcontractors or subawardees? How about the funding you receive as an R&D subcontractor?
- f. Do you track capital expenditures for R&D such as new construction or major equipment purchases? Can you tell me more about that?
- g. From your records or your knowledge of your organization's activities, are you able to identify what fields the research and/or development was performed in? For example, engineering, medical sciences, physical sciences, education, arts, humanities. [*Distribute Handout 1*]
- h. In the records you maintain, are you able to account for the indirect costs associated with your R&D projects?

Probe: What types of costs are included in "indirect costs" for your organization? [If they have external funding:] Do you have a federally negotiated rate for sponsored research?

- i. What office(s) in your organization would have access to the financial records for your R&D activities?

23. Finally, before we leave recordkeeping, I'd like to ask about the staff who conduct R&D. We are interested in learning how many of your staff are working on R&D projects. Is this something you track?

- a. Would you be able to report the total number of personnel working on R&D?
- b. [If yes] What about just the principal investigators?
- c. Could you provide a full time equivalent employee count of the personnel involved in R&D?
- d. What records or people would you consult to get this information? (Human resources, payroll, accounting, other source?)
- e. Would you also be able to report the number of these individuals who hold advanced degrees (e.g., masters, PhDs, post docs, or professional degree such as MD)?

## **VII. Data Use**

24. Is R&D spending information useful to your organization? What other types of information would be useful to have across nonprofits like yours?
25. [If R&D data are useful to them] Do you have a group of organizations you consider to be your peers? [If yes] Can you give us some examples of who is included and why? What kinds of information would you most like to see about the R&D activities of your peer organizations?

## **VIII. Survey Entrance into the Organization**

26. If your organization received a survey from the National Science Foundation, how would that be handled?
27. What factors would influence <NPO name>'s decision whether or not to respond to a survey on R&D? What would make you more likely to participate? Less likely?
28. (For R&D performers only): How would you/your organization/your board of directors/trustees feel about participating in an annual survey on R&D spending within NPOs? Who would most likely make the decision about whether or not to participate?
29. Who would be the best person to complete the survey for your organization? Would that person need to have the survey answers reviewed before returning them to NSF, or not?
30. What would be the best way for us to contact you about the survey initially -- by phone, by mail, by email, or something else?

## **IX. Closing**

*Before the last question, the interviewer should ask the NSF representative if she/he has anything else to ask or anything that needs clarification. The notetaker should quickly review his/her notes and see if anything needs to be clarified. This is especially important if the meeting is not audio recorded.*

31. [For R&D performers only] My last question, considering the types of information NSF is interested in collecting, do you have any advice as we move forward with the development of the questionnaire? Are there additional areas related to R&D within the nonprofit sector that you would like to have data on?

This concludes the interview. On behalf of NSF and ICF, I would like to thank you for your time. If there's anything else you think of after we've left, please let us know.

Handout 1

<b>Examples of R&amp;D Fields of Study</b>		
<b>Physical Sciences</b>	<b>Environmental Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, and Computer Sciences Fields</b>	<b>Life Sciences</b>
Astronomy Chemistry Physics	Atmospheric sciences Earth sciences Oceanography Mathematical sciences Computer sciences	Agricultural sciences Biological sciences Medical sciences
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>Psychology, Social Sciences, and Other Sciences Fields</b>	<b>Other Fields</b>
Aeronautical / Astronautical Bioengineering / Biomedical engineering Chemical Civil Electrical Mechanical Metallurgical/Materials	Psychology Economics Political science Sociology	Education Law Humanities Visual and performing arts Business and management Communication, journalism, and library science Social work