

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** April 12, 2017

**To:** Margo Schwab, Desk Officer  
Office of Management and Budget

**From:** John R. Gawalt, Division Director  
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics

**Via:** Suzanne Plimpton, Reports Clearance Officer  
National Science Foundation

**Subject:** Notification of cognitive research under generic clearance

This memorandum is to inform you of the National Science Foundations' (NSF's) plans to conduct cognitive research under the generic clearance for survey improvement projects (OMB number 3145-0174). This research will focus on testing and obtaining feedback regarding proposed content revisions for the Survey of Science and Engineering Research Facilities (Facilities Survey).

### Background

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) of NSF is broadly tasked with measuring the role of science and technology (S&T) in the United States' economy and abroad. A component of this activity is its sponsorship of the Congressionally mandated Facilities Survey, which collects information biennially on the square footage, construction, repair, renovation, and funding of research facilities at U.S. colleges and universities. The survey is a census of all research-performing colleges and universities in the United States that expended at least \$1 million in research and development funds in the prior fiscal year. It is completed by institutional coordinators at the academic institutions.

Before each cycle, NCSES examines the survey content for needed changes based on the evolving nature of research activities in the science and engineering fields. Before the next survey cycle in fall 2017, NCSES intends to talk with several universities and get their feedback on the proposed revisions to the research definition, the definition of the project start date for new construction and a new question on shared research space.

### Research Plan

NCSES plans to conduct approximately 20 phone discussions with survey coordinators from the FY 2015 survey, or their designees, and request their feedback on proposed changes to the survey content. Institutions will be selected to ensure representation across a variety of institutional characteristics such as research expenditures, public vs. private, geographic region,

and whether they reported new construction in the FY 2015 survey. Institutions that participated in recent interviews or site visits, those with complicated data retrieval followup in the FY 2015 survey, and those that did not respond to the FY 2015 survey will be excluded from selection.

To recruit respondents, NCSES will send e-mail invitations to the FY 2015 coordinators in selected institutions until the target number of participants is reached. NCSES anticipates sending 24 invitations to obtain feedback from up to 20 institutions. The email invitation will provide detailed information about the nature of the investigation including the proposed revisions (as an attachment) and the process for providing feedback. If the institution has not responded within a few days, the coordinator will be contacted by phone. An appointment will be requested, at their convenience, with the person most familiar with the content of the proposed revisions, which in most cases will be the institution's FY 2015 survey coordinator. After respondents agree to participate, NCSES will send an e-mail to thank them for their willingness to participate, offer to answer any questions, and confirm the appointment. Appendix A contains the proposed e-mail contacts and telephone followup script.

Proposed changes and guidelines on how to review the proposed changes (Appendix B) will be shared in the email invitation as noted above. Respondents will be asked to refer to their institutions' FY 2015 survey responses as they review the proposed changes, to consider the anticipated effects, if any, of the changes on previous responses, and to respond to one new question. Many institutions will have a record of their FY 2015 submission, but a copy will be provided upon request.

The phone discussions will be semi-structured interviews to explore respondents' feedback on the proposed changes for the FY 2017 survey (Appendix C). The discussions will elicit feedback on the proposed revisions to the definitions of research and project start date for new construction, as well as a new question on shared research space. The results of the cognitive research will be used internally by the NSF staff and NSF survey contractor for questionnaire development.

To ensure accurate note-taking, telephone discussions will be recorded with the consent of the participants. The participants will be informed of the intent, privacy and voluntary nature of the discussions. They will be asked to verbally confirm their approval to record the discussion. Participants can decline to be recorded, at which point the recorder will be turned off and note-taking will serve as the only means of documentation.

The contact protocol (Appendix A), proposed changes for testing (Appendix B) and telephone discussion protocol (Appendix C) are attached.

### Burden Information

A maximum of 20 cognitive interviews are planned. NCSES expects only one person to attend each interview on behalf of the institution. The estimated time for reviewing and responding to

the proposed changes and new survey question is 40 minutes. In addition, the phone discussion is anticipated to be about 25 minutes, resulting in about 22 total hours across all 20 interviews. NCSES also expects to contact 24 institutions for recruiting purposes. The recruiting process should average 10 minutes per institution for a total of 4 hours across institutions. Thus, the estimated total burden for this phase of our research is about 26 hours.

### Incentive Payments

We will not be offering incentive payments.

### Contact Information

The contact persons for questions regarding this research are:

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### Attachments

Appendix A: Contact Protocol  
Appendix B: Proposed Changes for Testing  
Appendix C: Telephone Discussion Protocol