

**REQUEST FOR GENERIC CLEARANCE OF SURVEY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS  
FROM THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING STATISTICS  
(NCSES)**

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) of the National Science Foundation (NSF) requests a three-year extension of the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) generic clearance that will allow NCSES to continue to rigorously develop, test, and evaluate its survey instruments, methodologies, and dissemination methods and tools. NSF has a mandate to "provide a central clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of data on scientific and engineering resources and to provide a source of information for policy formulation by other agencies of the Federal Government." This request is part of an ongoing initiative to improve NCSES surveys and other data collections as recommended by both its own guidelines and those of OMB.<sup>1</sup>

In the last decade, state-of-the art techniques have been increasingly instituted by NSF and other federal agencies, and are now routinely used to improve the quality and timeliness of survey data and analyses, while simultaneously reducing respondents' cognitive workload and burden. The purpose of this generic clearance is to allow NCSES to continue to adopt and use these techniques to improve its current data collections on science, engineering, and technology inputs and outputs. They will be used to improve the content of existing surveys, to aid in the development of new data collections to capture changes in the U.S. science and engineering (S&E) enterprise, and to fill gaps in coverage of the S&E enterprise in the existing NCSES portfolio. The generic clearance will also allow NCSES to explore the possibility of alternative methods of data collection, as well as data dissemination tools and mechanisms.

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<sup>1</sup> NSF Information Quality Guidelines are available on <http://www.nsf.gov/policies/infoqual.jsp>. OMB Information Quality Guidelines are available on <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/infoleg/infopoltech.html>. OMB standards and guidelines for statistical surveys are available on [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/infoleg/statpolicy/standards\\_stat\\_surveys.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/infoleg/statpolicy/standards_stat_surveys.pdf).

Following standard OMB requirements, NCSES will submit to OMB an individual request for each project it undertakes under this generic clearance. NCSES will request OMB approval in advance and provide OMB with a copy of the materials that describe the project, including the questionnaire (if one is used).

NCSES envisions using a variety of data collection techniques for the improvements, as appropriate to the individual projects, such as focus groups, cognitive and usability laboratory and field techniques, exploratory interviews, behavior coding, respondent debriefing, pilot studies, pretests and split-panel tests. NCSES has used such techniques in previous activities conducted under generic clearance.

- a. Focus Groups. A qualitative methodology that brings together a small number of relatively homogenous subjects to discuss pre-identified topics. A protocol containing questions or topics focused on a particular issue or issues is used to guide these sessions, and is administered by a trained facilitator. Focus groups are useful for exploring and identifying issues with either respondents or stakeholders. Focus groups are a good choice during the development of a survey or survey topic, when a pre-existing questionnaire or survey questions on the topic do not yet exist; they can also be useful in obtaining data user requirements for new or improved data delivery tools. In the past, NCSES has used focus groups to assist with redesigning surveys when it became evident that the content of a survey was outdated and did not reflect current issues or the context that respondents were facing.
- b. Cognitive and Usability Laboratory and Field Techniques. A qualitative methodology that refers to a set of tools employed to study and identify errors that are introduced during the survey process. These techniques are generally conducted by a researcher with an individual respondent, though observers may sometimes be present. Cognitive techniques are generally used to understand the question-response process, whereas usability is generally used to understand respondent reactions to the features of an electronic survey instrument, for instance, its display and navigation. In concurrent interviews, respondents are asked to think aloud as they actually answer the survey. In retrospective interviews, respondents answer the survey as they would normally, then ‘think aloud’ afterwards. Other techniques, which are

described in the literature and which will be employed as appropriate include: follow-up probing, memory cue tasks, paraphrasing, confidence rating, response latency measurements, free and dimensional sort classification tasks, and vignette classifications. The objective of all of these techniques is to aid in the development of surveys that work with respondents' thought processes, thus reducing response error and burden. These techniques are generally very useful for studying and revising a pre-existing questionnaire. NCSES has used cognitive and usability testing in previous generic clearance projects to improve existing survey items, to develop and refine new content on existing surveys, and to explore content for new surveys.

- c. Exploratory Interviews. A technique where interviews are conducted with individuals to gather information about a topical area. These may be used in the very early stages of developing a new survey or new data delivery mechanism. They may cover discussions related to administrative records, subject matter, definitions, functionality, etc. Exploratory interviews may also be used to investigate whether there are sufficient issues related to an existing data collection to consider a redesign. NCSES has used such interviews extensively in recordkeeping studies with respondents to several of its establishment surveys to determine both what types of records institutions keep (and therefore what types of information they can supply), as well as where and in what format such records are kept.
- d. Respondent Debriefing. A technique in which individuals are queried about how they have responded to a particular survey, question, or series of questions. The purpose of the debriefing is to determine if the original survey questions are understood as intended, to learn about respondents' form filling behavior and recordkeeping systems, or to elicit respondents' satisfaction with the survey. This information can then be used (especially if it is triangulated with other information) to improve the survey. This technique can be used as a qualitative or quantitative measurement, depending on how it is administered. This technique has been employed in NCSES generic clearance projects to identify potential problems with existing survey items both quantitatively and qualitatively.

- e. Pilot Studies/Pretests. These methodologies are typically used to test a preliminary version of the data collection instrument, as was done with the Early Career Doctorate Project. Pretests are used to gather data and assess reliability, validity, or other measurement issues. Pilot studies are also used to test aspects of implementation procedures. The sample may be purposive in nature, or limited to particular groups for whom the information is most needed. Alternatively, small samples can be selected to statistically represent at least some aspect of the survey population.
  
- f. Split Panel Tests. A technique for controlled experimental testing of alternatives. Thus, they allow one to choose from among competing questions, questionnaires, definitions, error messages, surveys, or survey improvement methodologies with greater confidence than other methods alone. Split panel tests conducted during the actual fielding of the survey are superior in that they support both internal validity (controlled comparisons of variable under investigation) and external validity (represent the population under study). Nearly any of the previously mentioned survey improvement methods can be strengthened when teamed with this method.
  
- g. Behavior Coding. A quantitative technique in which a standard set of codes is systematically applied to respondent/interviewer interactions in interviewer-administered surveys or respondent/questionnaire interactions in self-administered surveys. Though this technique can quantifiably identify problems with the wording of questions, it does not necessarily illuminate the underlying causes.

## **SECTION A. JUSTIFICATION**

### **A1. Legal Authority and Circumstances Requiring the Collection of Information**

The NSF National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) is responsible for collecting, analyzing, evaluating and disseminating information on science, engineering and technology employment, work force, and education, as well as research and development (R&D) funding and performance. In accordance with Sec. 3(a)(6) of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, and Section 505 of the America COMPETES Act (public law 110-69),

the National Science Foundation (NSF) is directed to “serve as a central Federal clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of objective data on science, engineering, technology, and research and development...that is relevant and useful to practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and the public.” NCSSES publishes data in individual survey reports and in such general reports as *Science and Engineering Indicators* and *Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering*. NCSSES also releases data in a variety of formats including data tables, data tools, interactive web tools, and public use files.

An extension to NCSSES’ previously-granted generic clearance is requested for several reasons. As a federal statistical agency, NCSSES is engaged in a process of continuous improvement in the data collections it conducts and in the way it provides access to data and information. Critical to the improvement in existing surveys is the ability to engage in small scale projects to test alternatives to current approaches being utilized in the surveys. Generic clearance authority substantially enhances NCSSES’ ability to engage in such testing and exploration. Furthermore, as the world continues to change, NCSSES must continuously evaluate its surveys in light of these changes. Respondent behaviors will change (e.g., response rates decrease over time); technology will change (e.g., the web quickly became a data collection option and is the primary mode for dissemination); and the S&E enterprise will change (e.g., today’s students increasingly pursue multi/interdisciplinary studies rather than a single discipline). Similarly, the understanding of how to improve surveys continues to evolve (e.g., today’s research continues to update the interpretation of the best implementation for web surveys).

Thus, NCSSES requests an OMB generic clearance structure to continue improving the overall quality of its statistical surveys, reduce the burden on respondents to NCSSES surveys, shorten the time required for NCSSES to update and improve its data collections, and redesign and improve its dissemination tools and methods.

## **A2. Purposes and Use of the Information**

The information obtained from these efforts will be used to develop new NSF surveys and improve current ones. Specifically, the information will be used to reduce respondent burden and to improve the quality of the data collected in these surveys. These objectives are met when respondents are presented with plain, coherent, and unambiguous questionnaires asking for data compatible with respondents’ memory and/or current reporting and recordkeeping practices. The

purpose of the survey improvement projects will be to ensure that NCSSES surveys are continuously attempting to meet these standards of excellence. In addition, the information obtained from data dissemination improvement efforts will be used to help design new data access tools or improve existing dissemination methods. Improved data access will help policymakers, researchers, and the general public by easing and streamlining the way they find the information they are seeking.

Improved NSF surveys will help policy makers in decisions on R&D funding, graduate education, scientific and technical workforce, innovation, as well as contribute to increased agency efficiency and reduced survey costs. In addition, methodological findings have broader implications for survey research and may be presented in technical papers at conferences or published in the proceedings of conferences or in journals.

### **A3. Use of Information Technology to Reduce Burden**

NCSSES will employ information technology, as appropriate, to reduce the burden of respondents who agree to participate in its survey improvement projects. Many respondents of current NCSSES surveys supply email addresses that can be used to recruit respondents for survey improvement projects. This allows respondents to communicate with NCSSES at their convenience. Respondents to current NCSSES surveys of academic institutions can often provide addresses for websites with additional information (e.g., about their schools), once again reducing their workload. NCSSES will continue to explore state-of-the-art technology to find ways to reduce burden on respondents to both individual and establishment surveys. For example, NCSSES used desktop sharing and teleconferencing software to conduct usability testing in remote locations to gather information about the functionality of its data dissemination tools. By using this software to digitally record both comments and web screen interactions, NCSSES had a complete record of each session that made it unlikely that there would be a need to call respondents back to clarify notes of the sessions.

Web surveys facilitate accurate data by providing respondents with automated tabulations and feedback on inconsistent answers. These features potentially reduce the need for followup contact with respondents. However, the success of these features resides in their being well designed to ensure that respondents are aware of these features. Thus, one focus of NCSSES improvement activities is improving the usability of NCSSES web surveys. NCSSES improvement

projects help ensure that respondents are presented with the most user friendly and least burdensome survey instruments possible. In addition, NCSSES continues to explore the adoption of innovative methods that could reduce respondent burden and provide easier access to data and information. Enhanced data dissemination tools help users find, organize, and download data faster and more accurately.

#### **A4. Efforts to Identify Duplication**

Survey improvement projects will be conducted both to improve existing surveys as well as to develop new NCSSES data collections. The NCSSES data collections themselves are subject to great scrutiny to ensure there is no duplication of other efforts. Likewise, the projects conducted under the generic clearance authority will be structured in order not to duplicate other efforts. Furthermore, generic clearance activities help avoid repetitious efforts to hone implementation for the full-scale surveys.

#### **A5. Provisions for Reducing Burden on Small Organizations**

One goal of NCSSES' efforts to improve its surveys is to minimize the burden on the small organizations that respond to NCSSES surveys. By learning about organizational and recordkeeping practices of small, medium, and large organizations, NCSSES is in a better position to design surveys and data collection procedures that minimize the burden for various types of respondents, especially small and very small entities. For example, NCSSES has investigated methods for surveying companies with fewer than five employees about their R&D activities.

In the case of pilot studies or split-panel tests, if probability samples are utilized, sampling rates proportional to size are often used to make sure that a large institution has a higher probability of being selected than a small institution. This ensures that a high proportion of the attribute of interest—U.S. S&E funding, performance, employment, or education—is captured while minimizing the burden on small entities.

#### **A6. Consequences of Not Collecting the Information**

Numerous consequences would result if NCSSES could not conduct the survey and data collection improvement projects requested in this document. The quality of the data collected could decrease because the current surveys would not be systematically evaluated and updated to better

reflect the current state of S&E. Over time, surveys that are now well designed would eventually become obsolete. New survey items and procedures could not be implemented without adequate testing and refinement. Advances in understanding of how organizations or individuals answer surveys or provide alternative forms of data, and how NCSES can better serve respondents, would be curtailed. Finally, NCSES' ability to develop timely, new, and well-designed surveys and data collections would be diminished.

#### **A7. Special Circumstances for Collection**

Under this clearance, NCSES will explain any circumstances that would result in respondents being required to:

- Report information to the agency more often than quarterly;
- Prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;
- Submit more than an original and two copies of any document;
- Retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;
- Respond to a statistical survey in a manner that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results, i.e., results that can be generalized to the universe of study;
- Use a statistical data classification that differs from one approved by OMB;
- Respond in a manner that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of compatible data with other agencies for confidential use;
- Submit proprietary trade secret or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.

#### **A8. Federal Register Notice and Consultation Outside the Agency**

Comments on this data collection effort were solicited in the Federal Register, Vol. 81, No. 7833, on Tuesday, February 16, 2016 (see Attachment A). NCSES received no comments related to this request.



The primary objectives of the survey and data collection improvement projects include involving respondents in the development of new survey content, soliciting respondent feedback to current surveys, observing respondent navigation of survey questionnaires, exploring how respondents' recordkeeping systems work, and eliciting feedback from data users on dissemination methods and tools. These objectives focus on consultation with respondents to reach the goals of understanding (1) how to minimize the time and effort to complete survey and data collection tasks, (2) how to reduce other aspects of burden such as concerns about the use of the survey data, and (3) how to motivate respondents to provide survey answers that have the highest quality and most accuracy.

#### **A9. Remuneration to Respondents**

NCSES and its contractors sometimes provide compensation to participants in improvement projects. In some cases, the compensation covers travel costs only. In other cases, compensation is offered in the range of \$25-\$75 for activities such as focus groups or cognitive interviews. This practice has proven necessary and effective in recruiting some types of subjects to participate in this small-scale research, and is also employed by other federal agencies. Testing activities are sometimes conducted in contractors' cognitive laboratories or other comparable facilities.

Unless otherwise specified and with approval granted by OMB, such incentives will be limited to no more than \$40 for participation in a cognitive interview and no more than \$75 for participation in a focus group. Respondents for field test activities such as split sample tests, behavior coding of interviewer/respondent interaction, and respondent debriefings will receive payment only when there are extenuating circumstances that warrant it. Generic clearance packages for projects offering participant compensation will explain the rationale and describe the amounts of compensation.

#### **A10. Assurance of Confidentiality Provided to Respondents**

Respondents in the improvement projects will be advised that their participation is voluntary. In focus groups, interviews, and other respondent activities, NCSES may ask respondents for permission to record sessions via audio or video recording. Such recordings are conducted to provide project staff, including those not present at the activity, with a complete and accurate record to supplement note taking. Recording the session also allows staff to focus more on what

is taking place during the session rather than on the completeness of their notes. In some cases, recordings may be used to train others to conduct this type of research or for illustrative purposes in presentations to professional audiences. For sessions that are recorded, respondents will be asked for their consent to the audio or video recording. They will be notified if there is any chance that a session may be played for audiences for research purposes.

Often activities conducted under the generic clearance authority will not involve pledging confidentiality to participants. However, there will be instances where confidentiality will be pledged, such as when the information being requested, either about an individual or an organization, may be sensitive. The pledge of confidentiality will be made under the Privacy Act (where applicable) and the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 (as amended). Specifically, when confidentiality is pledged to individuals, the pledge used will be the following:

The information is solicited under authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 as amended. All information you provide is protected under the NSF Act as amended and the Privacy Act of 1974 as amended and will only be used for research or statistical purposes. Any information publically released such as statistical summaries will be in a form that does not personally identify you.

When confidentiality is pledged to organizations, such as businesses, colleges and universities, and other non-profit organizations, the pledge used will be the following:

The information is solicited under authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 as amended. All information you provide is protected under the NSF Act as amended and will only be used for research or statistical purposes. Any information publically released such as statistical summaries will be in a form that does not personally identify you or your organization.

#### **A11. Questions of a Sensitive Nature**

No questions of a sensitive nature are anticipated in work conducted under this generic clearance. However, the nature of the exploration of survey content may include asking respondents whether items might be considered sensitive in the context of data collection.

#### **A12. Estimate of Response Burden**

NCSES estimates that a total reporting burden of 11,180 hours over the three years of the requested generic clearance will result from working to evaluate or improve existing surveys, to develop new surveys or data collections, or to evaluate data dissemination methods. This

includes both the burden placed on respondents participating in each activity as well as burden imposed on potential respondents during screening activities. Table 1 provides a list of potential surveys for which generic clearance activities might be conducted, along with estimates of the number of respondents and burden hours that might be involved in each.

**Table 1: Potential surveys for improvement projects, with the number of respondents and burden hours**

	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Hours</b>
Graduate Student Survey	2000	2500
SESTAT Surveys (National Survey of College Graduates; Survey of Doctorate Recipients)	1000	500
Early Career Doctorate Survey	500	1000
Survey of Earned Doctorates	600	600
Higher Education Research & Development Survey	300	540
State Government Research & Development Survey	150	300
Survey of Nonprofit Research Activities	230	415
Business Research & Development and Innovation Survey	50	150
Microbusiness Survey	250	500
Survey of Scientific & Engineering Facilities	400	400
Innovation Survey	1500	3000
Public Understanding of Science & Engineering Survey	550	125
Data dissemination tools and mechanisms	150	150
Other surveys and projects not specified	1000	1000
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,680</b>	<b>11,180</b>

**A13. Estimate of Total Cost to Respondents**

The cost to respondents generated by the list of potential projects is estimated to be \$512,379 over the three years of the clearance. No one year’s cost would exceed \$512,379 , so if all work were done in one year, costs in that one year would be \$512,379 and the costs in each of the other 2 years would be zero. As in previous requests for generic clearance authority, the total

cost was estimated by summing all the hours that might be used on all projects over the three years (11,180) and multiplying that figure by the hourly wage (\$45.83) of the level of employee who typically answers NCSES' questionnaires or attends NCSES workshops. This wage amount is the May 2015 national cross-industry estimate of the mean hourly wage for a financial analyst, or Job Category 13-2051, by the Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes132051.htm>, accessed on 4/11/2016). The total hours are based on similar NCSES projects over the past few years.

There are no planned capital, startup, operation or maintenance costs to the respondents, recordkeepers, or data users involved in these improvement projects. Some explorations involving the use of alternative sources of data (e.g., converting respondents' records into a standard format for upload) may entail some costs; in such events, details would be provided in the materials associated with that burden request.

#### **A14. Estimates of Annualized Costs to the Federal Government**

The 3-year cost to the Federal government generated by the improvement projects is estimated to be approximately \$2,800,000 (estimate based on \$200,000 per line in Table 1). The main components of these costs are contractor costs and staff time. There are no startup, equipment, operations or maintenance costs. Bidders on the NCSES contracts are required to have all software, licenses, and hardware needed to complete the survey improvement projects. The costs generated by future data collections will be described in the clearance request for each specific data collection.

#### **A15. Changes in Burden**

The request for 11,180 burden hours is lower than the current generic clearance (14,280 hours).

#### **A16. Plans for Publication**

Data will be collected to develop new surveys, improve the content or methodology of current surveys, explore alternative sources of data, or evaluate data dissemination mechanisms. Methodological findings from improvement projects may be referenced in the technical notes for published data, in methodology reports, in technical papers presented at conferences, in the

proceedings of conferences, or in journals. Generic clearance activities will not be used to calculate substantive results or estimates that will be released.

**A17. OMB Approval Expiration Date**

NCSES will display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection on survey instruments.

**A18. Exceptions to the Certification Statement**

No exceptions to the Certification Statement should be required. If so, OMB approval will be requested in advance of conducting the survey or data collection.

will be held on March 3, 2016, as follows: The policy discussion session (open to the public) will convene at 10:30 a.m. until approximately 11:30 a.m., followed by the discussion of specific grant applications and programs before the Council (closed to the public) from 11:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

Digital Humanities: Room 4089  
Education Programs: Room P002  
Preservation and Access: Room 2002  
Public Programs/Federal/State

Partnership: Room P003

Research Programs: Room 4002

In addition, the Humanities Medal Committee (closed to the public) will meet from 2:30 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. in Room 4002.

The plenary session of the National Council on the Humanities will convene on March 4, 2016, at 9:00 a.m. in the Conference Center at Constitution Center. The agenda for the morning session (open to the public) will be as follows:

A. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

B. Reports

1. Chairman's Remarks
2. Deputy Chairman's Remarks
3. Presentation by guest speaker Mannie Jackson
4. Congressional Affairs Report
5. Budget Report
6. Reports on Policy and General Matters
  - a. Digital Humanities
  - b. Education Programs
  - c. Preservation and Access
  - d. Public Programs
  - e. Federal/State Partnership
  - f. Research Programs

The remainder of the plenary session will be for consideration of specific applications and therefore will be closed to the public.

As identified above, portions of the meeting of the National Council on the Humanities will be closed to the public pursuant to sections 552b(c)(4), 552b(c)(6) and 552b(c)(9)(b) of Title 5 U.S.C., as amended. The closed sessions will include review of personal and/or proprietary financial and commercial information given in confidence to the agency by grant applicants, and discussion of certain information, the premature disclosure of which could significantly frustrate implementation of proposed agency action. I have made this determination pursuant to the authority granted me by the Chairman's Delegation of Authority to Close Advisory Committee Meetings dated July 19, 1993.

Please note that individuals planning to attend the public sessions of the meeting are subject to security screening procedures. If you wish to attend any of the public sessions, please inform NEH as soon as possible by contacting Ms. Katherine Griffin at (202) 606-8322 or

[kgriffin@neh.gov](mailto:kgriffin@neh.gov). Please also provide advance notice of any special needs or accommodations, including for a sign language interpreter.

Dated: February 8, 2016.

**Elizabeth Voyatzis,**

*Committee Management Officer.*

[FR Doc. 2016-03063 Filed 2-12-16; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 7536-01-P**

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## NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

### Sunshine Act Meeting; National Science Board

The National Science Board's Committee on Education and Human Resources (CEH), pursuant to NSF regulations (45 CFR part 614), the National Science Foundation Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 1862n-5), and the Government in the Sunshine Act (5 U.S.C. 552b), hereby gives notice of the scheduling of a teleconference for the transaction of National Science Board business, as follows:

**DATE AND TIME:** Wednesday, February 17, 2016 at 5:00-6:00 p.m. EST.

**SUBJECT MATTER:** Committee Chair's opening remarks; approval of minutes of November 19, 2015 meeting; update and discussion of recent CEH activities regarding the "grand challenges in STEM" activity; and Committee Chair's closing remarks.

**STATUS:** Open.

This meeting will be held by teleconference. A public listening line will be available. Members of the public must contact the Board Office (call 703-292-7000 or send an email message to [nationalsciencebrd@nsf.gov](mailto:nationalsciencebrd@nsf.gov)) at least 24 hours prior to the teleconference for the public listening number. Please refer to the National Science Board Web site for additional information and schedule updates (time, place, subject matter or status of meeting) which may be found at <http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/notices/>. Point of contact for this meeting is Matt Wilson ([mbwilson@nsf.gov](mailto:mbwilson@nsf.gov)).

**Kyscha Slater-Williams,**

*Program Specialist to the National Science Board.*

[FR Doc. 2016-03126 Filed 2-11-16; 11:15 am]

**BILLING CODE 7555-01-P**

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## NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

### Agency Information Collection Activities: Comment Request

**AGENCY:** National Science Foundation.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The National Science Foundation (NSF) is announcing plans to request renewal of the Generic Clearance of the National Center for Science & Engineering Statistics Survey Improvement Projects (3145-0174). In accordance with the requirement of section 3506(c)(2)(A) of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), we are providing opportunity for public comment on this action. After obtaining and considering public comment, NSF will prepare the submission requesting that OMB approve clearance of this collection for three years.

*Comments:* Comments are invited on (a) whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the NSF, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the NSF's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, use, and clarity of the information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

**DATES:** Written comments on this notice must be received by April 18, 2016 to be assured of consideration. Comments received after that date will be considered to the extent practicable.

*For Additional Information or Comments:* Contact Suzanne H. Plimpton, Reports Clearance Officer, National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 295, Arlington, Virginia 22230; telephone (703) 292-7556; or send email to [splimpto@nsf.gov](mailto:splimpto@nsf.gov). Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339, which is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (including federal holidays). You also may obtain a copy of the data collection instrument and instructions from Ms. Plimpton.

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

*Title of Collection:* Generic Clearance of the National Center for Science & Engineering Statistics Improvement Projects.

*OMB Control Number:* 3145-0174.

*Expiration Date of Current Approval:* May 31, 2016.

*Type of Request:* Intent to seek approval to extend an information collection for three years.

*Abstract.* Established within the National Science Foundation by the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 § 505, codified in the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, the National Center for Science & Engineering Statistics (NCSES) serves as a central Federal clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of objective data on science, engineering, technology, research and development for use by practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and the public. NCSES conducts about a dozen nationally representative surveys to obtain the data for these purposes. The Generic Clearance will be used to ensure that the highest quality data are obtained from these surveys. State of the art methodology will be used to develop, evaluate, and test questionnaires and survey concepts as well as to improve survey methodology. This may include field or pilot tests of questions for future large scale surveys, as needed. The Generic Clearance will also be used to test and evaluate data dissemination tools and methods, in an effort to improve access for data users.

*Use of the Information.* The purpose of these studies is to use the latest and most appropriate methodology to improve NCSES surveys, evaluate new data collection efforts, and evaluate data dissemination tools and mechanisms. Methodological findings may be presented externally in technical papers at conferences, published in the proceedings of conferences, or in journals. Improved NCSES surveys, data collections, and data dissemination will help policymakers in decisions on research and development funding, graduate education, and the scientific and technical workforce, as well as contributing to reduced survey costs.

*Expected Respondents.* The respondents will be from industry, academia, nonprofit organizations, members of the public, and State, local, and Federal governments. Respondents will be either individuals or institutions, depending on the topic under investigation. Qualitative procedures will generally be conducted in person, online (using Skype, Webex, or other conferencing tools), or over the phone. Quantitative procedures may be conducted using mail, Web, email, or phone modes, depending on the topic under investigation. Up to 8,680 respondents will be contacted across all

projects. No respondent will be contacted more than twice in one year under this generic clearance. Every effort will be made to use technology to limit the burden on respondents from small entities.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to improve NCSES's current data collection instruments and processes and to reduce respondent burden, as well as to develop new surveys and new or improved data dissemination tools. Qualitative methods include, but are not limited to expert review; exploratory, cognitive, and usability interviews; focus groups; and respondent debriefings. Cognitive and usability interviews may include the use of scenarios, paraphrasing, card sorts, vignette classifications, and rating tasks. Quantitative methods include, but are not limited to, telephone surveys; behavior coding, split panel tests, and field tests.

*Estimate of Burden.* NCSES estimates that a total reporting and recordkeeping burden of 11,180 hours will result from activities to improve its surveys. The calculation is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1—POTENTIAL SURVEYS FOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS, WITH THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS AND BURDEN HOURS

	Number of respondents	Number of hours
Graduate Student Survey .....	2000	2500
SESTAT Surveys (National Survey of College Graduates; Survey of Doctorate Recipients) .....	1000	500
Early Career Doctorate Survey .....	500	1000
Survey of Earned Doctorates .....	600	600
Higher Education Research & Development Survey .....	300	540
State Government Research & Development Survey .....	150	300
Survey of Nonprofit Research Activities .....	230	415
Business Research & Development and Innovation Survey .....	50	150
Microbusiness Survey .....	250	500
Survey of Scientific & Engineering Facilities .....	400	400
Innovation Survey .....	1500	3000
Public Understanding of Science & Engineering Survey .....	550	125
Data dissemination tools and mechanisms .....	150	150
Other surveys and projects not specified .....	1000	1000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>8,680</b>	<b>11,180</b>

Dated: February 3, 2016.

**Suzanne H. Plimpton,**

*Reports Clearance Officer, National Science Foundation.*

[FR Doc. 2016-03029 Filed 2-12-16; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 7555-01-P

**NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**

[Docket No. 40-38367-ML; ASLBP No. 16-945-01-MLA-BD01]

**Rare Element Resources, Inc.; Establishment of Atomic Safety and Licensing Board**

Pursuant to delegation by the Commission, *see* 37 FR 28,710 (Dec. 29, 1972), and the Commission's

regulations, *see, e.g.*, 10 CFR 2.104, 2.105, 2.300, 2.309, 2.313, 2.318, 2.321, notice is hereby given that an Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (Board) is being established to preside over the following proceeding:

RARE ELEMENT RESOURCES, INC.  
(Bear Lodge Project)

This proceeding involves an application by Rare Element Resources, Inc. for a license to possess and use source material associated with its Bear