

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 19, 2020

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

From: Emilda B. Rivers, Director
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics
National Science Foundation

Via: Suzanne Plimpton, Reports Clearance Officer
National Science Foundation

Subject: Notification of respondent debriefing research under generic clearance

This memorandum is to inform you of the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics' plans to conduct respondent debriefing interviews under the generic clearance for survey improvement projects (OMB number 3145-0174). This research will focus on review and feedback on the employment questions which were added to the FY 2020 Survey of State Government Research and Development on October 5, 2020 and sent to state government agencies the same month. These new questions ask state agencies to report the number of personnel working on internal R&D, and the number of FTEs those personnel represent.

Background

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), within the National Science Foundation (NSF) is broadly tasked with measuring the role of science and technology (S&T) in the United States' economy. A component of this activity is its sponsorship of the Survey of State Government Research and Development (State R&D Survey), which has been conducted every one or two years since 2006, and annually since 2016. The State R&D Survey collects information on the sources and recipients of funds from state government agencies for research and development; approximately 700 state agencies are in the survey universe, although only about 350 have R&D expenses in a given fiscal year.

The State R&D Survey is one of several surveys at NCSES that collects comparable information on R&D from different sectors of the economy (e.g., businesses, colleges and universities, and government). In 2020, following two rounds of cognitive interviews, NCSES added two additional questions to this survey regarding R&D personnel by headcount and by Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE). The addition of these variables will allow NCSES to provide information not available elsewhere to data users interested in science policy, specifically on the nature of the science and engineering workforce within state government agencies. NCSES plans to conduct a series of debriefing interviews with state agencies to assess these new questions and their context within the other questions on intramural R&D performance.

Research Plan

There were 185 state agencies which reported some internal R&D (that is, R&D performed by the state agency itself, as opposed to funding R&D performed by others) in the FY 2019 survey. Some states have many agencies that report internal R&D, while other states have only a few.

NCSES plans to conduct up to 30 virtual interviews with state agencies that report internal R&D during the FY 2020 survey cycle; the 30 interviews will be conducted on a rolling basis as responses are received. Agencies will be selected across states to ensure geographical diversity and by differing amounts of internal R&D expenditures and R&D personnel to reflect the unique nature of the state governments R&D activities throughout the data collection cycle. State agencies will be contacted by a function of agency size, state, and when they respond to the survey, and whether additional follow-up on the survey response are needed.

To recruit respondents, NCSES will send e-mail invitations (Appendix A) to the FY 2020 survey respondents in selected agencies as responses are received. The email invitation will provide detailed information about the nature of the investigation and the process for providing feedback. If the institution has not responded within a few days, the respondent will be contacted by telephone. An appointment will be requested, at their convenience, with the person most familiar with the content of the survey response, which in most cases will be the agency's FY 2020 survey respondent. 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 arrange for a virtual meeting.

The 2020 cycle of the survey will be in the field at the time of the debriefings so that version of the instrument (Appendix B) will be used. The discussions will focus on the definitions of R&D, the wording of the questions, the ability of the respondent to answer the new questions, and the appropriate placement of the new questions within the existing questionnaire; the interview protocol is in Appendix C.

The participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary. Each interview will be summarized based on notes taken by NCSES staff.

Burden Information

NCSES expects to conduct a total of 30 interviews of no more than 30 minutes each with survey respondent to understand how they completed the FY 2020 survey and specifically the newly added personnel questions. NCSES estimates that, in the recruiting phase of the project, approximately 60 agencies will be contacted, for approximately 5 minutes per agency, for a recruiting burden of approximately 5 hours. Thus, the estimated total burden for this project is about 20 hours (5 recruiting burden hours + 15 cognitive interview hours).

Incentive Payments

NCSES will not be offering incentive payments.

Contact Information

The contact persons for questions regarding this research are:

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Attachments

Appendix A: Initial Contact Email
Appendix B: FY 2020 Survey of State Government R&D questionnaire
Appendix C: Interview Protocol