

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

for the

Survey of Science and Engineering Research Facilities

Section A

FY 2023 and FY 2025 Cycles

3145-0101

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Section A: Justification

A.1. Why the Collection is Necessary

Established within the NSF 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 and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) serves as a central Federal clearinghouse for the collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of objective data on science, engineering, technology, and research and development for use by practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and the public.

The Survey of Science and Engineering Research Facilities (Facilities survey) conducted by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF) is a congressionally mandated biennial survey that has been conducted since 1986. The Facilities survey collects data on “bricks and mortar” research facilities, including total research space by field, condition of research space, and expenses for construction, repairs and renovation of research space.

Background

Academic research facilities in the fields of science and engineering (S&E) are an important national resource. Extensive hearings were held during the 99th Congress in the House and Senate committees on science and technology to examine the research facilities needs of universities and colleges. Both committees found “sufficient evidence to suggest the presence of a serious and growing problem...” and expressed concern that the Federal government did not have in place an ongoing analytical system to document the current status of and needs for research facilities by major field of science and engineering.

In recognition of the need for objective information about research facilities, Congress directed NSF, in the Authorization Act of November 22, 1985 (P.L. 99-159, Section 108) as follows:

The National Science Foundation is authorized to design, establish, and maintain a data collection and analysis capability in the Foundation for the purpose of identifying and assessing the research facilities needs of universities. The needs of universities, by field of science and engineering, for construction and modernization of research laboratories, including fixed equipment and major research equipment, shall be documented. University expenditures for the construction and modernization of research facilities, the sources of

funds, and other appropriate data shall be collected and analyzed. The Foundation, in conjunction with other appropriate Federal agencies, shall conduct the necessary survey every 2 years and report the results to the Congress.

In response to this directive, NCSES has conducted nineteen surveys, generally on a biennial basis. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) cosponsored the surveys with NCSES beginning with the initial survey and ending with the 2009 survey. At the request of NIH, the survey also collected data from nonprofit, biomedical research organizations and hospitals that received NIH research funds.

Since 1986, NCSES has modified the survey several times with the goals of improving data quality and reducing respondent burden. The inaugural survey was limited to a small set of prescribed questions sent to a sample of institutions using NCSES's Quick Response Survey questionnaire capability to meet the Congressional timeframes. Data collection was subsequently expanded to a census of institutions to make the data more useful to Federal and State agencies and to the higher education community.

NCSES undertook a major review of the survey prior to the FY 2003 data collection. This included improving the research space questionnaire and adding a second questionnaire to capture the growing use of computing and networking resources (cyberinfrastructure) in conducting research. NCSES continually reviewed the second questionnaire to stay current with the rapidly changing developments in academic R&D cyberinfrastructure.

Despite these efforts, NCSES believed that the cyberinfrastructure questionnaire provided little utility to policymakers and researchers. A 2013 review of the survey by the NSF Division of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure (ACI) provided feedback on shortcomings and potential changes to improve the survey. The assessment indicated that the "information is not useful for program planning at NSF and is probably not very useful to campuses either." Anecdotal evidence solicited through several interviews and meetings with groups of field experts indicated that these data are rarely used by those who are aware of this survey. This view was substantiated by analysis of low web traffic to the relevant data files on the NCSES website. Further inquiries revealed that many potential data users believed the data would be difficult to incorporate into their decision making processes. Consequently, the questionnaire on computing and networking capacity was discontinued starting with the FY 2015 survey.

NCSES conducted a review from 2010 to 2015 of the S&E fields used in its portfolio of surveys to ensure consistency and comparability across national academic surveys. The review resulted in a modified taxonomy of S&E discipline that reassigned a number of subfields and relabeled some field names. These changes were thereafter employed by all NCSES academic surveys, including the Facilities survey.

NCSES revised the FY 2017 survey and data collection materials based on a methodological review of several items. These included a new question on shared research space, changes to the definition of start date for new construction, and changes to the instructions for completion costs. NCSES also revised the definition of research to better align the definition across NCSES surveys. No substantive changes have been made to the survey since then and no substantive changes are proposed for the FY 2023 survey. The complete questionnaire can be found in Attachment B.

A.2. Uses of this Information

Data from this survey serve several audiences. At the national level, the data provide Congress and federal agencies with a broad, quantitative picture of the inventory and condition of existing S&E research space at research-performing academic institutions. The survey also provides data on the current and future capital expenditures for research facilities by universities and colleges; sources of funding for research facilities at these institutions and; plans for future repair/renovation and new construction of science and engineering research facilities. Congress uses the Facilities survey data to assist them in estimating appropriations and programmatic decisions.

At the state and local level, state legislatures, state agencies, and individual universities and colleges use the data to assist them in making budgetary decisions and in planning future activities. Private sector architectural, engineering, and construction firms use the data for several purposes including forecasting the demand for their products and services. Finally, professional associations such as the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology use the data to assist them in assessing needs related to their associated fields of science.

NCSES also uses the data in its own survey specific publications as well as in the Academic R&D thematic report of *Science and Engineering Indicators* produced for the National Science Board. Data are publicly available through an InfoBrief and detailed statistical tables on the NCSES website at

<http://nsf.gov/statistics/srvyfacilities/>. Users can run custom data reports from the Facilities survey and other NCSES surveys through the Interactive Data Tool at <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/home>.

A.3. Use of Automated, Electronic, Mechanical or Other Technological Techniques

The survey is a mixed mode survey: respondents have the option of completing a printable PDF version or a web version. The large majority of institutions (99% in FY 2021 cycle) respond to the survey via the web.

The web version of the survey is a .NET application with a real-time monitoring system, which allows NCSES to monitor data, response status, and comments from respondents. The web version provides convenient functionality for the respondents through automated skip patterns and automatically calculated totals. NCSES also benefits from use of the web version by receiving improved data quality. Data quality is improved using several techniques such as data checks, skip patterns, and consistency checks. For example, data checks are used to calculate totals and inform respondents if percentages do not add to 100. When there are inconsistencies, respondents will receive error messages notifying them of the problem and the actions they need to take to correct it.

A.4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

NCSES monitors the availability and release of higher education research facilities data through relevant sources published by individual university and university consortia (e.g., North Carolina's Facilities Inventory and Utilization Study), nonprofit organizations (e.g., Tradeline, Inc.), and for-profit publications (e.g., Sightlines). While some sources provide data on amount of construction or costs of construction, no organization provides data on higher education research facilities, individual fields of science, or science and engineering in the aggregate. For example, at the national level, data on the book value of higher education physical plant assets is collected periodically on the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. However, these data are only collected in the aggregate for an institution; the data are not available for research space, and the data are not available by S&E field. The Facilities survey is the only survey to collect data from research-performing higher education institutions on research space and fields of S&E. The data do not duplicate statistical data from any other sources.

A.5. Impact on Small Entities

Data are not collected from small business.

A.6. Consequences of Less Frequent Data Collection

The Congressional mandate requires that data collection occur every two years, which ensures that the data are current. This frequency also lessens burden when compared with an annual survey. Conducting the survey less frequently could adversely affect the relevance of the data both for policymakers and other data users. NCSES has consulted with numerous individual institutions on the periodicity of data collection (see section A.8. on public comment and consultations outside the agency). These institutions believe that more frequent data collection would not benefit the data-user community due to the relatively slow processes of space management (construction, repairs and renovations). It would only result in greater burden on the institutions.

A.7. Special Circumstances

No special circumstances.

A.8. Consultations Outside the Agency

In preparation for the FY 2023 survey cycle, NCSES conducted nine online interviews with survey coordinators to explore ways in which space usage and reporting may have changed in recent years and whether changes are attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has substantially altered employment and workspace dynamics. The interviews corroborated results of similar interviews conducted prior to the FY 2021 survey on potential impacts of the pandemic. The interviews helped determine whether more extensive exploration was needed for potential survey instructional or question changes to the FY 2023 survey instrument.

Respondents reported little impact to the total amount of research space due to the pandemic. Any noted changes were related to how the research space was used. For some, the use of the research space intensified, being used more often, while others noted that their research space was becoming more interdisciplinary. Similarly, the amount of office research space was largely unaffected by the pandemic. Changes in this area could have necessitated a change in guidelines. Consequently, no

further investigations were needed, and no changes were recommended for the FY 2023 survey instrument.

NCSES published a 60-day Federal Register Notice (88 FR 15102) on March 10, 2023 to solicit public feedback on the reinstatement and approval of data collection for the Facilities Survey (Attachment C). No comments were received.

A.9. Payments or Gifts to Respondents

Respondents will not be paid or receive gifts.

A.10. Assurance of Confidentiality

Data on individuals are not collected. Based on the idea that the data should be available to all interested parties and that making the institutional level data more accessible will provide institutions with a reason to respond to the survey, NCSES makes the data publicly available at the institution level with a few key exceptions (see section A.11 on sensitive questions). Institutions are clearly informed of NCSES's confidentiality policy at the front of the survey and the confidentiality of specific questions. Institutions are informed of the plans for public release of institution-level data before they complete the survey. This information is included in the questionnaire. In addition, institutions are informed that the survey is voluntary and they can decline to answer any or all questions.

A.11. Justification for Asking Sensitive Questions

While NCSES decided to make the large majority of the survey data publicly available, three survey items are deemed particularly sensitive. The public release of data on those questions could make institutions less inclined to respond to the survey. During pretests of the 2001 survey redesign, respondents expressed concern about the confidentiality of the following survey items: condition of research space (question 7), and the presence and amount of research animal space (questions 1i, 3, and 10f). Publicly reporting the condition of research space might motivate institutions to overstate their facilities' condition as a way to recruit researchers or gain research funding. Animal research space has always been sensitive due to public concerns about the use and treatment of research animals. Based on the 2001 pretest and the 2014–15 interviews, NCSES believes these data points might not be able to collect quality data, if at all, if they were published on the institutional level. Therefore, data on these fields are only published at the national level.

A.12. Burden Estimate

Burden hours

The Facilities survey is a biennial census of approximately 600 academic institutions. The burden for any particular institution will be affected by two major factors: the size of the institution (in terms of number of S&E departments and/or the number and size of research facilities) and the status of the institution's central records system. Record-keeping research showed that many institutions, as part of their compliance with OMB Circular A-21 and 2 CFR 220, have created centralized databases, including a measure of space devoted to research.

Because of these factors, the completion time varies between institutions. A question on survey completion time was added to the FY 2013 questionnaire. The average time to complete the research space questionnaire was 19 hours. The survey typically has a 97% response rate (based on the FY 2019 – 2021 response rates). The estimated total burden for FY 2023 is 11,400 hours, with a similar burden estimated for FY 2025 (600 institutions x 19 hours x 2 data collection cycles = 22,800 total burden hours over the total clearance period.).

The table below summarizes the average annual respondent burden anticipated for each survey cycle.

Year	Respondents	Average Response Time	Total Burden Hours	Estimated Hourly Wage	Total Cost
2023	600	19 hours	11,400	\$42	\$ 478,800
2025	600	19 hours	11,400	\$42	\$ 478,800
Total Burden	1,200		22,800		\$957,600

Costs to responding institutions

Costs that will be incurred by responding institutions include the completion time for filling out the questionnaire and the additional time institutional coordinators need to manage the distribution of survey questionnaire to its responding units and submission of the responses. The institutional coordinator makes the initial contacts with the relevant individual offices at the institution informing

them of the survey, distributes the questionnaire, follows up on the return of the forms or data to the coordinator's office, and transmits the forms or data to NCSES.

At an estimated cost of \$42 an hour for institution staff (based on an average across categories of the Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2021 average hourly wages for "Administrative Services and Facilities Managers," "Budget Analysts," and "Financial Analysts" within NAICS 611300 - Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools), the average cost to each academic institution is \$798 for FY 2023 and a similar cost for FY 2025. The total respondent costs for the FY 2023 survey are estimated to be \$478,800(600 institutions x \$798). These costs are expected to be similar for the FY 2025 cycle of the survey.

A.13. Costs to Respondents

There are no capital or startup costs for the respondents of the Facilities survey.

A.14. Costs to Federal Government

The estimated total cost of the FY 2023 Facilities survey to the Federal Government is approximately \$1,765,000 over a period of 24 months, for an annualized cost of \$883,000. The estimate includes labor costs of \$340,000 for NCSES staff (project manager (part time), NCSES management, statistical support, and other staff) and the survey management contractual cost of \$1,425,000.

The contract will include all direct and indirect costs of data collection, analysis, reporting, and the production of public and proprietary data sets. These costs are expected to be similar for the FY 2025 survey cycle.

A.15. Changes from Prior Cycle

No program changes.

A.16. Plans for Tabulation or Publication

The FY 2023 survey implementation is scheduled to begin in October of 2023. Data collection will take place over a six-month period in order to provide institutions adequate time to identify a

coordinator and to gather the appropriate records and data. Data collection is expected to end in the spring of 2024. The data collection for the FY 2025 cycle will begin in October of 2025 and will end in the spring of 2026.

The contractor will submit draft data tabulations within three months following completion of data collection. These will be reviewed and revised as needed by NCSES before production of final data tabulations. NCSES will be responsible for electronic dissemination of the tables to NSF offices, participating academic institutions, professional associations, and others who may request information about the survey.

The contractor will also provide a public use data file that will be accessible via the NSF website and includes electronic data files. The data files, including documentation, will contain institutional data and will be delivered within 3 months of data collection. In addition, the contractor will provide a methodology report detailing all survey activities, materials, and procedures.

NCSES produced an Infobrief on the results of the FY 2021 survey in December of 2022. The Infobrief includes a presentation of major findings, charts and graphs relevant to the survey, and relevant statistical tables. It also refers the reader to additional information about survey limitations and other technical information.

NCSES anticipates a similar schedule for the FY 2023 and FY 2025 survey cycles.

A.17. Exception to Displaying the OMB Expiration Date

Not applicable. The OMB number and expiration date will be displayed.

A.18. Exceptions to the Certification Statement

Not applicable. No exceptions to the certification statement are being sought.