

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
NASA Astronaut Candidate Selection Qualifications Inquiry
OMB CONTROL No. 2700-0156

Type of Information Collection: Revision of a Currently Approved Information Collection

Abstract: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) collects this information to support its process for evaluating and selecting Astronaut Candidates. Input from people who know an applicant professionally helps NASA understand the applicant's qualifications and readiness for the program. This contributes to a fair, informed, and effective selection process that supports the agency's human spaceflight mission.

Summary of Changes from Previously Approved Collection

This revision corrects inaccuracies in the previously approved burden estimate. The prior approved collection calculated burden using only two references per applicant, this was updated to reflect the required five references per applicant, resulting in 2,250 potential respondents (450 highly qualified applicants × 5 references). Recalculating the burden using the correct number of respondents yields a maximum burden of 750 hours. The respondent cost estimate was also updated to reflect the current national average hourly wage (\$37.35), resulting in a total annual respondent cost of \$27,743. Postage costs were updated to reflect the current USPS rate (\$0.95) for the fillable PDF option.

1. Need for the Information Collection.

The NASA Astronaut Selection Office (ASO) is responsible for selecting astronauts for various United States Space Exploration programs. The program is managed at the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston, Texas.

Candidates apply through USAJOBS—the Federal Government's official employment site—in response to the Astronaut Candidate vacancy announcement, and their applications are then released to the agency. After a thorough application review process, which includes NASA Astronauts participating as subject-matter experts, a subset of applicants is placed in the 'highly qualified' rating category.

When evaluating an applicant for the Astronaut Candidate Program, it is important that the ASO have the benefit of qualitative and quantitative information and recommendations from people who have been directly associated with the applicant over the course of their career. NASA then requests information from external professionals and personal references identified by each applicant. Respondents include current and former supervisors, previous employers or direct-reporting managers, same-level co-workers, and personal references who can provide information about the applicant's character and performance.

2. Purpose and Use of the Information.^{1 1}

The information collected will be used by NASA ASO and NASA Human Resources personnel, as part of the candidate selection process, to gain insight into the candidates' work ethic and professionalism, as demonstrated during previous employment activities.

The information will be collected one (1) time per candidate during the selection period (tentatively scheduled annually). Upon completion of the selection process, the information will become a

permanent part of the candidates' archived application package. The collection of information, associated with individuals who successfully complete the program and are subsequently designated as "Astronauts", will become a permanent part of the Astronauts' Official Personnel File (OPF), and ultimately designated as a National Archive.

3. Use of Information Technology.

The collection is conducted entirely through a secure electronic web form (<https://ascan-references.jsc.nasa.gov>), is the primary and standard method for submitting reference information. The form is accessible only during active recruitment periods. Because of the sensitivity of the data, the system is designed specifically for secure online submission using encrypted transmission. If a respondent is unable or prefers not to use the online form, NASA can provide a fillable PDF by email; however, no respondents have requested or used this option in recent selection cycles. As a result, all submissions are completed electronically. After submission, the information is stored in a secure NASA database where it remains encrypted at rest and is accessible only to authorized personnel.

4. Duplication of Information.

There is no duplication of information because the information is collected directly from respondents, on an on-demand basis. The reference information cannot be obtained from existing sources within NASA, other government agencies, or external sources.

5. Burden on Small Businesses or other Small Entities.

The collection of information does not involve or affect small businesses or other small entities.

6. Consequences of Not Conducting the Collection.

If the collection is not conducted, the ability of NASA ASO to adequately assess the experience and qualifications of Astronaut candidates will be adversely impacted. References enable the collection of both factual and objective information.

Per the Office of Personnel Management, reference checking is an objective evaluation of an applicant's past job performance based on information collected from key individuals (e.g., supervisors, peers, subordinates) who have known and worked with the applicant. Reference checking is primarily used to:

- Verify the accuracy of information given by job applicants through other selection processes (e.g., résumés, occupational questionnaires, interviews)
- Predict the success of job applicants by comparing their experience to the competencies required by the job
- Uncover background information on applicants that may not have been identified by other selection procedures

7. Special Circumstances.

There are no special circumstances. All data will be collected in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6.

8. Consultations and Public Comments.

A 60-day Federal Register Notice (FRN) [90 FR 58630](#), was published on 12/17/2025.

One comment, [NASA-2025-0267-0002](#), was received on 02/17/2026 along with an attachment,

emphasizing that without rigorous, merit-based behavioral and professional screening, NASA risks selecting astronaut candidates who may undermine mission safety, crew cohesion, and long-duration exploration success. It also stresses that weakening structured qualitative evaluation would erode institutional credibility, public trust, and the integrity of NASA's human spaceflight program. In response, the Astronaut Office corrected previous inaccuracies, to reflect accurately five personal and professional references, as opposed to two references previously approved, resulting in a more accurate calculation of expected responses, burden hours, and cost. A detailed response to this comment has been uploaded under Supplementary Documents.

The 30-day FRN [91 FR 39640](#), was published on 06/30/2026.

9. Payments or Gifts to respondents.

No payments or gifts are provided to respondents.

10. Confidentiality.

NASA does not provide any assurance of confidentiality. Personal and sensitive information collected is handled in accordance with NASA's privacy and information security policies and can be accessed via the following links: NASA Privacy Policy <https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/displayDir.cfm?t=NPD&c=1382&s=17K> and NASA Information Security Policy <https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/displayDir.cfm?t=NPD&c=2810&s=1F>

A Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) was conducted for this collection and can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/astronaut-candidate-selection-system-2025.pdf?emrc=6a42089862230>)

Astronaut selection records are covered by NASA Records Retention Schedules (NRRS) 08/035.0 ASTRONAUT SELECTION DATABASE (ELECTRONIC) https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/NPR_attachments/NRRS_1441.1_09032025.pdf. They are treated as permanent records and transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA.)

Respondents are provided with a Privacy Act Statement, information is maintained under the Privacy Act of 1974 in accordance with System of Records Notice (SORN) NASA 10ACSR - Astronaut Candidate Selection Records, was published in the Federal Register as Document Citation 80 FR 79937 and can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/12/23/2015-32289/privacy-act-of-1974-privacy-act-system-of-records>

11. Questions of Sensitive Nature.

No questions considered sensitive are being asked in this collection.

12. Burden of Information Collection.

On average, over 8,000 applications are received for each Astronaut vacancy announcement. Approximately 450 are highly qualified applicants, and each provides the ASO with a list of at least five (5) personal and professional references – two (2) key professional references (current and most recent previous supervisors) and three (3) additional personal (character) references, totaling 2,250 potential responses.

The table below summarizes the estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

Category of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Participation Time	Burden Hours
Individuals	2,250	20 minutes	750

13. Annual Cost to Respondents or Recordkeepers.

Using the March 2026 United States average hourly earnings of \$37.35 (source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/realer.t01.htm>) the cost of a respondent filling out and submitting the questionnaire online is calculated to be:

$\$37.35/\text{hour} \times 0.33 \text{ hours} = \$12.33 \text{ per respondent}$, $\$12.33 \times 2,250 \text{ respondents} = \$27,743 \text{ total annual respondent cost}$.

Although the postage cost estimate was updated to reflect the current USPS rate (\$0.95) for the fillable PDF option, all submissions in recent cycles have been electronic and no respondents have requested or used the PDF-by-mail option.

By using existing, available computer hardware, software, and services, NASA estimates a zero cost (\$0.00) burden to record-keepers.

14. Cost to the Federal government.

NASA ASO estimates approximately \$50,905.00 in annualized cost, representing contractor labor costs for database management and server hardware maintenance.

15. Reasons for Changes in Burden.

The change in burden results from corrections to respondent assumptions identified during the 60-day public comment period. The previously approved collection calculated burden using only two references per applicant; however, applicants are required to provide five references, resulting in 2,250 potential respondents and 750 burden hours. The cost to respondents was updated to reflect the current national average hourly wage of \$37.35, increasing the total annual respondent cost to \$27,743. NASA also updated the postage cost estimate to the current USPS First-Class rate of \$0.95 for the contingency PDF-by-mail option.

16. Publication of Results.

The collection results will not be published.

17. Display of OMB Expiration Date.

The collection will display an approved Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) statement for this collection.

18. Exceptions to Certification for PRA Submissions.

There are no exceptions to the certification statement stated in 5 CFR 1320.9.