



National Center for Science and  
Engineering Statistics

## Survey Description

# Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development

NCSES 26-005 | May 04, 2026

## Contents

<b>Survey Overview (FYs 2024–25 Survey Cycle; Volume 74)</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key Survey Information</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Survey Design</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Data Collection and Processing</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Survey Quality Measures</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Data Availability and Comparability</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Data Products</b>	<b>8</b>

# Survey Overview (FYs 2024–25 Survey Cycle; Volume 74)

---

## Purpose

The annual Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development (Federal Funds for R&D) is the primary source of information about federal funding for R&D in the United States. The results of the survey are also used in the federal government's calculation of U.S. gross domestic product at the national and state levels, used for policy analysis, and used for budget purposes for the Federal Laboratory Consortium for Technology Transfer, the Small Business Innovation Research, and the Small Business Technology Transfer. The survey is sponsored by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF).

## Data collection authority

The information is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended, and the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010. NCSES has reviewed this product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved its release (NCSES-DRN26-001).

## Major changes to recent survey cycle

There are no changes to the survey for this cycle.

# Key Survey Information

---

**Frequency** Annual.

**Initial survey year** 1951.

**Reference period** FYs 2024–25.

**Response unit** Federal agencies.

**Sample or census** Census.

**Population size** The population consists of the 30 federal agencies that conduct R&D programs, excluding the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA). For the volume 74 (FYs 2024–25) survey cycle, one agency known for conducting R&D programs, the Library of Congress, was unable to report and did not provide inputs to estimate data. Therefore, data users should use caution when comparing survey results.

**Sample size** Not applicable; the survey is a census of all federal agencies that conduct R&D programs, excluding the CIA and the NSA.

**Key variables**

Key variables of interest are listed below.

The survey provides data on federal obligations by the following key variables:

- Federal agency
- Field of R&D (formerly field of science and engineering)
- Geographic location (within the United States and by foreign country or economy)
- Performer (type of organization doing the work)
- R&D plant (facilities and major equipment)
- Type of R&D (research, development, testing, and evaluation [RDT&E] for Department of Defense [DOD] agencies)
  - Basic research
  - Applied research
  - Development, also known as experimental development

The survey provides data on federal outlays by the following key variables:

- R&D (RDT&E for DOD agencies)
- R&D plant

Note that the variables “R&D,” “type of R&D,” and “R&D plant” in this survey use definitions comparable to those used by the Office of Management and Budget [Circular A-11](#), Section 84 (Schedule C).

# Survey Design

---

## Target population

The population consists of the federal agencies that conduct R&D programs, excluding the CIA and the NSA. For the FYs 2024–25 cycle, one agency known to conduct R&D programs, the Library of Congress, was unable to report and did not provide inputs to estimate data. Therefore, data users should use caution when comparing survey results. A total of 30 federal agencies (14 federal departments and 16 independent agencies) were subject to R&D data collection during this cycle.

## Sampling frame

The survey is a census of all federal agencies that conduct R&D programs, excluding the CIA and the NSA. The agencies are identified from information in the president’s budget submitted to Congress. The Analytical Perspectives volume and the “Detailed Budget Estimates by Agency” section of the appendix to the president’s budget identify agencies that receive funding for R&D.

## Sample design

Not applicable.

# Data Collection and Processing

---

## Data collection

Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc. (Synectics) performed the data collection for volume 74 (FYs 2024–25) under contract to NCSES. Agencies were initially contacted by e-mail to verify the contact information of each agency-level survey respondent. A Web-based data collection system is used for the survey. Multiple subdivisions of some federal departments were permitted to submit information to create a complete accounting of the departments' R&D funding activities.

Data collection for Federal Funds for R&D began in May 2025 and continued into November 2025.

## Data processing

A Web-based data collection system is used to collect and manage data for the survey. This Web-based system was designed to help improve survey reporting and reduce data collection and processing costs by offering respondents direct online reporting and editing.

All data collection efforts, data imports, and trend checking are accomplished using the Web-based data collection system. The Web-based data collection system has a component that allows survey respondents to enter their data online; it also has a component that allows the contractor to monitor support requests, data entry, and data issues.

## Estimation techniques

Published totals are created by summing respondent data, there are no survey weights or other adjustments.

# Survey Quality Measures

---

## Sampling error

Not applicable.

## Coverage error

For the FYs 2024–25 cycle, one agency known to conduct R&D programs, the Library of Congress, was unable to report and did not provide inputs to estimate data. Therefore, data users should use caution when comparing survey results. The CIA and the NSA are purposely excluded from the survey coverage.

## Nonresponse error

To increase item response, agencies are encouraged to estimate when actual data are unavailable. The survey instrument allows respondents to enter data or skip data fields. There are several possible sources of nonresponse error by respondents, including inadvertently skipping data fields, skipping data fields when data are unavailable, or entering \$0 when specific data are unavailable.

## Measurement error

Some measurement problems are known to exist in the Federal Funds for R&D data. Some agencies cannot report the full costs of R&D, the final performer of R&D, or R&D plant data.

For example, DOD does not include headquarters' costs of planning and administering R&D programs, which are estimated at a fraction of 1% of its total cost. DOD has stated that identification of amounts at this level is impracticable.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the Department of Health and Human Services currently has many of its awards in its financial system without any field of R&D code. Therefore, NIH uses an alternate source to estimate its research dollars by field of R&D. NIH uses scientific class codes (based upon history of grant, content of the title, and the name of the awarding institute or center) as an approximation for field of R&D.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) does not include any field of R&D codes in its financial database. Consequently, NASA has developed a method of estimating what percentage of the agency's research dollars are allocated into the fields of R&D.

Also, agencies are required to report the ultimate performer of R&D. However, through past workshops, NCSES has learned that some agencies do not always track their R&D dollars to the ultimate performer of R&D. This leads to some degree of misclassification of performers of R&D, but NCSES has not determined the extent of the errors in performer misclassification by the reporting agencies.

R&D plant data are underreported to some extent because of the difficulty some agencies, particularly DOD and NASA, encounter in identifying and reporting these data. DOD's respondents report obligations for R&D plant funded under the agency's appropriation for construction, but they are able to identify only a small portion of the R&D plant support that is within R&D contracts funded from DOD's appropriation for RDT&E. Similarly, NASA respondents cannot separately identify the portions of industrial R&D contracts that apply to R&D plant because these data are subsumed in the R&D data covering industrial performance. NASA R&D plant data for other performing sectors are reported separately.

# Data Availability and Comparability

---

## Data availability

Annual data are available for FYs 1951–2025.

## Data comparability

Until the release of volume 71 (FYs 2021–22) the information included in this survey had been unchanged since volume 23 (FYs 1973–75), when federal obligations for research to universities and colleges by agency and detailed field of science and engineering were added to the survey. Other variables (such as type of R&D and type of performer) are available from the early 1950s on. The volume 71 survey revisions maintained the four main R&D crosscuts collected previously (i.e., type of R&D, field of R&D [previously referred to as field of science and engineering], type of performer, and geographic area). However, there were revisions within these crosscuts to ensure consistency with other NCSES surveys. These include revisions to the fields of R&D and the type of performer categories (see the [Methodology tab](#) within the [Federal Funds for R&D Survey page](#), technical table A-3 for a crosswalk of the fields of science and engineering to the fields of R&D). In addition, new variables were added, such as field of R&D for experimental development (whereas before, the survey participants had only reported fields of R&D [formerly fields of science] for basic research and applied research). Grants and contracts for extramural R&D performers and obligations to University Affiliated Research Centers were also added in volume 71.

Every time new data are released, past years' data may be changed because agencies sometimes update older information or reclassify responses for prior years as additional budget data become available. For trend comparisons, use the historical data from only the most recent publication, which incorporates changes agencies have made in prior year data to reflect program reclassifications or other corrections. Do not use data published earlier.

# Data Products

---

## Publications

NCSES publishes data from this survey annually in tables and analytic reports available at [Federal Funds for R&D Survey page](#).

## Electronic access

Access to the data for major data elements are available in NCSES's interactive data tool at <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/>.