



National Center for Science and
Engineering Statistics

Survey Description

FFRDC Research and Development Survey

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Survey Overview (FY 2025 Survey Cycle)

Purpose

The FFRDC Research and Development Survey is conducted by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). It is the primary source of information on research and development (R&D) expenditures that are separately accounted for at federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs) in the United States.

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. The Office of Management and Budget control number is 3145-0100, with an expiration date of 30 September 2028. NCSES has reviewed this product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved its release (NCSES-DRN26-024).

Major changes to recent survey cycle

None.

Key Survey Information

Frequency	Annual.
Initial survey year	FY 2001.
Reference period	FY 2025.
Response unit	Establishment.
Sample or census	Census.
Population size	41.
Sample size	The survey is a census of all known FFRDCs.
Key variables	Key variables of interest are listed below. ● R&D expenditures by source of funds (federal, state and local, business, nonprofit, or other) ● R&D expenditures by federal agency source ● R&D expenditures by type of R&D (basic research, applied research, or experimental development) ● R&D expenditures by type of costs (salaries, software, equipment, subcontracts, other direct costs, and indirect costs) ● Total operating budget ● R&D personnel headcounts and full-time equivalents by R&D function

Survey Design

Target population

All FFRDCs.

Sampling frame

The total survey universe is identified through the Master Government List of FFRDCs (<https://ncses.nsf.gov/resource/master-gov-lists-ffrdc>). NSF is responsible for maintaining this list and queries all federal agencies annually to determine any changes to, additions to, or deletions from the list.

Sample design

The FFRDC R&D Survey is a census of all current FFRDCs identified on the Master Government List of FFRDCs.

Data Collection and Processing

Data collection

The FY 2025 survey announcements were sent by email to all FFRDCs in November 2025. The data collection period concluded in April 2026. Respondents could choose to complete a questionnaire downloaded from the Web or use a Web-based data collection system to respond to the survey. Every effort was made to maintain close contact with respondents to preserve the consistency and continuity of the resulting data. Survey data reports were available to respondents on the survey website for each FFRDC; these reports helped quality assurance by displaying comparisons between the responding FFRDC's current year and the 2 prior years of data and noted any substantive disparities.

Data processing

Respondents using the Web-based data collection system were asked to explain significant differences between current and past year reporting while completing the questionnaire. Questionnaires were carefully examined by survey staff for completeness upon receipt. Reviews focused on unexplained missing data and explanations provided for changes in reporting patterns. If additional explanations or data revisions were needed, respondents were sent personalized emails asking them to provide any necessary revisions before the final processing and tabulation of data. Respondents were encouraged to correct prior year data, if necessary. When respondents updated or amended figures from past years, NCSES made corresponding changes to trend data in the FY 2025 data tables and to the underlying microdata. For accurate historical data, use only the most recently released data tables.

Estimation techniques

Missing values were imputed based on the previous year's data and the reported data of peer organizations.

Survey Quality Measures

Sampling error

Because the FY 2025 survey was a survey distributed to all organizations in the universe, there was no sampling error.

Coverage error

Given the availability of a comprehensive FFRDC list, there is no known coverage error for this survey. FFRDCs are identified through the [Master Government List of FFRDCs](#). NSF is responsible for maintaining the master list and queries all federal agencies annually to determine changes to, additions to, or deletions from the list.

Nonresponse error

Most FFRDCs have incorporated the data needed to complete most of the survey questions into their record-keeping systems. Eleven FFRDCs chose not to complete any of Question 4 (R&D costs), which asks for expenditures by type of cost. Those FFRDCs are managed by private companies or universities for whom cost structures are considered proprietary. Other FFRDCs did not answer all sections of Question 4: two could not provide software and equipment expenditures, and one could not provide equipment expenditures. One FFRDC did not report its operating budget (Question 5). Six FFRDCs chose not to complete Question 6, which asks for full-time equivalents (FTEs) and headcounts for R&D staff. All of those FFRDCs are managed by private companies for whom staffing structure information is considered proprietary. One FFRDC could not provide FTEs and headcounts for R&D support staff because they could not separate R&D support staff from administrative support staff. Variables for Questions 4 and 5 are not tabulated and are not included in the public use file. Question 6 values are included in data tables aggregated for all FFRDCs. However, they are not tabulated at the organizational level or included in the public use file.

Measurement error

NCSES discovered during the FY 2011 survey cycle that seven FFRDCs included capital project expenditures in the R&D totals reported on the survey. Corrections made for the FY 2011 survey cycle lowered total expenditures by \$468 million. However, previous years still include an unknown amount of capital expenditures in the total. The amount is estimated to be less than \$500 million per year.

Prior to the FY 2011 survey, the five FFRDCs administered by the MITRE Corporation had reported only internally funded R&D expenditures. After discussions with NCSES, these five FFRDCs agreed to report all FY 2011 operating expenditures for R&D and to revise their data for FYs 2008–10.

NCSES discovered during the FY 2013 survey cycle that Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) was reporting some expenditures that were not for R&D as defined by this survey. Corrections made for the FY 2013 survey cycle lowered the laboratory's total expenditures by \$349 million. LANL also was incorrectly reporting that all expenditures were for basic research. In corrections made for FY 2013, LANL reported that \$1,554 million (91%) of its total research expenditures was for applied research. LANL data from previous years still include an unknown amount of expenditures that were not for R&D and categorize all expenditures as basic research.

Prior to FY 2014, the Aerospace FFRDC reported expenditures only on internal R&D projects. After discussions with NCSES, the Aerospace Corporation agreed to report all R&D expenditures for FY 2014 and provide revised data to include all R&D expenditures for FYs 2010–13. R&D expenditures increased by more than \$800 million each year.

Prior to the FY 2021 collection, NCSES discovered that the Green Bank Observatory had split from the National Radio Astronomy Observatory on 1 October 2016; both retained FFRDC status. For FYs 2017–20, R&D expenditures reported for the National Radio Astronomy Observatory include the expenditures for the Green Bank Observatory. The Green Bank Observatory began reporting separately on the FY 2021 survey.

During the FY 2024 survey cycle, the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) changed reporting methodology to align with practices of other Department of Energy supported laboratories. INL began categorizing all work as R&D except for manufacturing and for security and protection projects. INL's reported R&D expenditures increased from \$653 million in FY 2023 to \$1,617 million in FY 2024.

INL did not provide data for the FY 2025 survey cycle. Their totals were imputed.

Data Availability and Comparability

Data availability

Annual data are available for all FFRDCs for FYs 2001–25.

Data comparability

When the review for consistency between each year's data and submissions in prior years reveals discrepancies, it is sometimes necessary to modify prior years' data. For accurate historical data, use only the most recently released data tables. Individuals wishing to analyze trends other than those in the most recent NCSES publication are encouraged to contact NCSES for more information about the comparability of data over time.

Data Products

Publications

The data from this survey are published annually and available at the survey page (<https://nces.nsf.gov/surveys/ffrdc-research-development/>). Information from this survey is also included in *Science and Engineering Indicators*.

Electronic access

Public use files are available at <https://nces.nsf.gov/explore-data/microdata/ffrdc-research-development>.