

Understanding Federal Investments in Research and Development

The Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development

Every year the federal government invests in the expansion of knowledge and innovation within the United States by contributing a portion of the nation's funds toward research and development (R&D). Supporting various R&D efforts allows the federal government to promote economic growth as well as technological advances.

The Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development (Federal Funds Survey) is the primary source of information about federal funding for R&D in the United States.

What is the Federal Funds Survey?

The Federal Funds Survey is an annual census completed by the federal agencies that conduct R&D programs. There is no federal-wide budget specifically for R&D. Instead, R&D is a component within multiple federal agency budgets. The survey is sponsored by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation.

How can I use the Federal Funds Survey?

Data from the Federal Funds Survey can answer questions like

- Which federal agencies obligate the most funds toward R&D?
- How are federal obligations for R&D distributed across fields of R&D (e.g., life sciences, physical sciences, and engineering)?
- How is R&D funding distributed by type (i.e., basic research, applied research, or experimental development)?
- How much did agencies obligate to different R&D performers (i.e., types of organizations doing the work)?
- What states have federally funded R&D performers, and which states receive the highest funding?
- With data back to 1951, how has federal R&D funding changed over time?



Why is the Federal Funds Survey important?

The Federal Funds Survey provides detailed data on federal agency obligations for R&D. The results of the survey are used to help implement three federal programs: the Federal Laboratory Consortium for Technology Transfer, Small Business Innovation Research, and the Small Business Technology Transfer. Data from the Federal Funds Survey are also used and referenced by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Government Accountability Office, the Congressional Research Service, and industry to understand agency R&D priorities and missions.

For more information, the [Federal Funds Survey homepage](https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-funds-research-development/) (<https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-funds-research-development/>) features additional details about the survey, its questionnaires, and links to related publications and products.



Data details

Where can I find Federal Funds Survey data?

Federal Funds Survey data can be found in several places throughout the NCSES website. On the survey's [homepage](#), the Data tab offers data tables that can be downloaded by users, and the Analysis tab chronicles all NCSES publications that use the survey's data. NCSES's interactive [data tools](https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/) (<https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/>) allow users to explore data and to build charts and tables tailored to their unique research interests.

What is federal spending?

There are three types of federal spending.



Budget authority: The amount of money available to an agency for specific purposes, set by law.



Obligations: A legally binding commitment for goods or services, with monies set aside to be paid out in the future, usually in the form of grants and contracts.



Outlays: The disbursement of cash, checks, and electronic transfers to execute previous obligations.

Federal agencies provide data on their obligations such as

- Type of R&D
- Field of R&D by type of R&D
- Performer by type of R&D
- Geographic location (within the United States, by area of the state and by foreign country)
- R&D plant (i.e., facility construction and major equipment)

The Federal Funds Survey collects data from federal agencies about federal funding for R&D in the United States. For detailed data from federal agencies about their obligations to individual academic and nonprofit institutions, see the [Federal S&E Support Survey homepage](https://nces.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-support-survey/) (<https://nces.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-support-survey/>).

Products supported by Federal Funds Survey data

Federal Funds Survey data are used in NCSES publications, such as InfoBriefs, special reports, and data tables. Its data also supplement NCSES publications such as *National Patterns of R&D Resources* and *Science and Engineering State Profiles*.



Survey specifics

Frequency: Annual

Initial survey year: 1951

Reference period: Fiscal year

Response unit: Federal agencies

Sample or census: Census

Population size: 33 federal agencies (and suboffices such as program offices, field offices, and branch offices)

Sample size: The survey is a census of all federal agencies that conduct R&D programs (excluding the Central Intelligence Agency)



National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES)

For more information about NCSES's products and data collection process, visit <https://nces.nsf.gov>. You can also explore our Surveys page at <https://nces.nsf.gov/surveys> to learn more about NCSES surveys and the Federal Funds Survey, as well as its methodology, survey design, and questionnaires.