



## Exploratory Interviews for the Nonprofit R&D Survey: Early Findings

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[www.nsf.gov/statistics/](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/)



### Overview

- 20 exploratory interviews with research-performing nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in 4 major cities: San Antonio, Atlanta, Boston, and Seattle
- Selected large, medium, and small NPOs with varying levels and types of research activity – including some focused on social science and education
- Timeframe: June and July 2014 (San Antonio trip completed)



## Interview Topics

- Defining research and development – how organization describes its activities, other terms for R&D, examples of projects
- Funding R&D activities outside the organization – types of recipients and projects
- R&D activities within the organization – funding sources and types of projects
- Joint projects with other organizations

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## Interview Topics (continued)

- Recordkeeping on R&D activities:
  - Can the R&D projects be tracked separately from other spending?
  - Do they know how many employees are involved in R&D projects?
  - Can R&D be tracked by funding source and/or field?
- Would national data on R&D within NPOs be useful to them?
- Who are peer organizations, what information would be helpful to know about them?
- Who should the survey be sent to and how (email/web or mail)?
- How likely are you to respond to a survey from NSF?

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## Findings from First Trip Overview

- Four interviews completed in San Antonio: two large research institutes, two smaller organizations with limited research activity
- Each organization had a very different operating model and used different language to describe its activities
- All expressed interest in the project and thought it sounded worthwhile, although one smaller NPO said it probably would not respond to any survey due to time/resource constraints

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## Findings from First Trip Types of R&D Projects

- fMRI consciousness research
- Genetics research, including large family longitudinal studies
- Virology research, vaccine development
- Fuel and emissions technology
- Elementary school health curriculum development and outcome evaluation

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## Findings from First Trip Definitions of R&D

- NPOs had multiple ways of describing their R&D activities:
  - “Translational neuroscience”
  - “Basic research”
  - “Research” OR “development” - not “R&D”
  - “Science”
  - “Feed and bleed” – drug testing on animals
  - “RDT&E” – research, development, testing, and evaluation
  - “Problem solving”
  - “Curriculum development”
  - “Evaluation”

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## Findings from First Trip R&D Activities and Funding Sources

- R&D activities within the organizations were primarily funded through grants and contracts from federal government and industry
- Very small proportion of R&D paid through internal funds
- One NPO funded small research awards to university researchers through endowment income
- Two NPOs regularly conducted joint projects with universities or other NPOs

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## Findings from First Trip Recordkeeping

- Three operated on calendar year fiscal years (FYs), one on federal FY
- Only one NPO said they could easily separate spending (including salaries) for R&D activities from all other activities
- One research institute said they would likely report total operating expenses as R&D, despite some testing and evaluation activities included in total

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## Findings from First Trip Recordkeeping (continued)

- Although not officially tracked, small NPOs could determine proportion spent on research activities due to small number of projects
- All NPOs could report expenditures by source of funding, and all would be able to identify the fields of R&D
- All could provide headcounts of personnel involved in R&D, but only one could provide a full-time equivalent calculation

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## Findings from First Trip Data Uses

- All said data on R&D spending within NPOs would be useful to have
- Common peers reported were university departments and other NPOs working in their fields
- Types of data of interest:
  - R&D data by tax exempt status and field of research
  - Revenue
  - Recovered indirect cost allocation
  - Geographic area
  - Number of employees
  - Side business income (e.g. cell lines)
  - Salary ranges for research personnel

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## Findings from First Trip Motivation to Respond

- All participants felt the survey was a worthwhile effort
- Three out of four indicated they would likely respond to the survey
- Most preferred an initial mailing versus email-only contacts
- All preferred a late spring/summer survey timeframe

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## Next Steps

- Complete remainder of exploratory interviews:
  - Atlanta – July 7-9
  - Boston – July 14-17
  - Seattle – July 21-25
  
- Summary of all interviews by late August
  
- First questionnaire draft by early October
  
- Cognitive testing and submission to OMB in early 2015
  
- Pilot test summer 2015