Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs): Background and Issues for Congress

Updated May 15, 2026

Congressional Research Service
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R44629

CRS REPORT
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

SUMMARY

R44629

May 15, 2026

Marcy E. Gallo
Analyst in Science and Technology Policy

Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs): Background and Issues for Congress

Federally funded research and development centers, or FFRDCs, are a special class of research institutions that are dependent on federal support, but operated and managed by contractors. FFRDCs are intended to provide federal agencies with R&D capabilities that cannot be effectively met by the federal government or the private sector alone. FFRDCs are required to have a long-term strategic relationship with the federal agency that supports them. This relationship is presumed to convey a number of benefits, including the ability of an FFRDC to recruit and retain scientific and technical expertise; an in-depth knowledge of, and the capability to rapidly respond to, the R&D needs of the federal agency; and the capacity to offer independent and objective scientific and technical advice. As of February 2026, 12 federal agencies sponsor or co-sponsor a total of 41 FFRDCs. These FFRDCs provide R&D capabilities in support of federal agency missions in a broad range of areas—from energy and cybersecurity to cancer and astronomy. In FY2024, the federal government supported over $31 billion in R&D conducted at FFRDCs.

Congress maintains a continuing interest in FFRDCs due to their contributions to U.S. technological and economic leadership. However, some Members of Congress have questioned the appropriate role of FFRDCs in the federal R&D enterprise and the ability of FFRDCs to effectively address federal agency R&D needs. The following issues are of general interest: (1) the effectiveness of federal agency oversight and management of FFRDCs; (2) competition between FFRDCs and the private sector for federal R&D funding; (3) the diversification of FFDRC activities or "mission creep"; (4) the award of noncompetitive FFRDC management and operation contracts; and (5) the adequacy of FFRDC facilities and infrastructure.

Contents

Figures

Appendixes

Contacts

Background

Federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs) are a special type of contractor-operated research centers that conduct research and development (R&D) and related activities in support of a federal agency's mission. FFRDCs operate under the framework of the Federal Acquisition Regulation.[1] They differ from other performers of federal R&D—such as federal laboratories, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private firms—in that they are designed to meet a "special long-term research or development need which cannot be met as effectively by existing in-house or contractor resources" and that they have "access, beyond that which is common to the normal contractual relationship, to Government and supplier data, including sensitive and proprietary data, and to employees and installations equipment and real property."[2] The share of federally funded R&D performed by FFRDCs has increased steadily over time from 5% in FY1953 to 17% in FY2024.[3]

This report provides an overview of FFRDCs, including their history and characteristics. It also provides selected issues for congressional consideration related to the use, oversight, and management of FFRDCs (e.g., concerns over competition with the private sector and "mission creep"), in addition to their role in the federal R&D enterprise.

Origins of FFRDCs

FFRDCs have their origin in World War II. During that time, the federal government sought to mobilize the country's scientific and engineering talent and apply it to the development of technologies that would aid U.S. war efforts. For example, the Lincoln Laboratory established by the Department of Defense (DOD), which is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347, was created to develop radar for identifying aircraft and ships. In addition, the Los Alamos and Oak Ridge National Laboratories (now under the auspices of the Department of Energy [DOE]) were established to support the development of the atomic bomb. The purpose of FFRDCs—to bring scientific and technical expertise to bear on pressing national R&D challenges—remains.

Then, as now, it was widely believed that a lack of flexibility in the federal government made it difficult to recruit and maintain scientific and technical talent.[4] Since contractors operate FFRDCs, many federal restrictions, including restrictions on pay and hiring, do not apply increasing the flexibility of FFRDCs compared to the federal government.

FFRDCs were called "Federal Contract Research Centers" until 1967.[5] In November 1967, the chairman of the Federal Council for Science and Technology, a predecessor to the National Science and Technology Council,[6] sent a memorandum to federal science agencies formally

[1] Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 35.017.

[2] FAR 35.017.

[3] CRS analysis of National Science Foundation (NSF), National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), *National Patterns of R&D Resources: 2023–2024*, NSF 26-313, Table 6, February 2026, https://ncses.nsf.gov/data-collections/national-patterns/2023-2024.

[4] Jill M. Hruby et al., *The Evolution of Federally Funded Research & Development Centers*, Public Interest Report, Federation of American Scientists, Spring 2011, p. 24.

[5] NSF, NCSES, *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers: General Notes*, February 2026, https://ncses.nsf.gov/resource/master-gov-lists-ffrdc/general-notes.

[6] The National Science and Technology Council, located within the Executive Office of President, is tasked with coordinating science and technology policy across the federal government.

changing the name of Federal Contract Research Centers to FFRDCs and detailing criteria for the establishment of an FFRDC.[7] Accordingly, an FFRDC was required to

- conduct basic research, applied research, or development, or perform R&D management;
- be independently incorporated or constitute a separate organizational unit within the parent organization;
- perform R&D under the direction of the federal government;
- receive 70% or more of its funding from the federal government, typically from one sponsoring agency;
- have a long-term relationship with its sponsoring agency (about five years or more);
- have most or all of its facilities be federally owned or funded by the government as part of its contract; and
- have an average annual budget of at least $500,000.[8]

In 1984, the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) issued a policy letter revising and updating the governance of FFRDCs.[9] The OFPP issued regulations in 1990 that incorporated the principles articulated in the policy letter as part of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR).[10] The FAR now defines the purposes of an FFRDC, in addition to the policies that direct an FFRDC's establishment, use, review, and termination. The "Characteristics of FFRDCs" as defined by the FAR are discussed in more detail later in this report.

Current FFRDCs

NSF has the responsibility of maintaining a master list of FFRDCs across the federal government.[11] As of February 2026, 12 federal agencies sponsor or co-sponsor a total of 41 FFRDCs.[12] These FFRDCs provide R&D capabilities in a broad range of areas—from energy and cybersecurity to cancer and astronomy. DOE and DOD sponsor a majority of the FFRDCs, 16 and 10, respectively. The National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsors 5 centers, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) sponsors 3, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sponsors 2. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) each sponsor a single FFRDC. The Department of the Treasury (Treasury), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Social Security Administration co-sponsor a single FFRDC that serves all three.

[7] NSF, NCSES, *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers: General Notes*, February 2026, https://ncses.nsf.gov/resource/master-gov-lists-ffrdc/general-notes.

[8] NSF, NCSES, *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers: General Notes*.

[9] 49 *Federal Register* 14462, April 11, 1984.

[10] 55 *Federal Register* 3885, February 1990. These regulations are codified in Federal Acquisition Regulation 35.017.

[11] In 1990, per FAR 35.017-6, NSF was given the responsibility of maintaining a master list of federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs). According to NSF, it "does not decide which organizations meet the FFRDC criteria. Rather, NSF adds each FFRDC to the list when the head of the sponsoring agency notifies NSF in writing that he or she has approved a new FFRDC." See NSF, NCSES, *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers: General Notes*, February 2026, https://ncses.nsf.gov/resource/master-gov-lists-ffrdc/general-notes.

[12] NSF, NCSES, *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers*, February 2026, http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/ffrdclist/.

FFRDCs are classified into three "activity types" or categories under a system established by DOD and adopted by NSF.[13] DOD defines the three FFRDC categories as follows:

- **Research and development laboratories** focus on the development and prototyping of new technologies and capabilities to meet agency needs, engage in research programs that emphasize the evolution and demonstration of advanced concepts, and transfer new technologies to the private sector.
- **Study and analysis centers** deliver independent and objective analysis and advice in core areas in support of agency policy and strategy development, decisionmaking, and alternative approaches.
- **System engineering and integration centers** meet long-term technical and engineering needs with independence and objectivity to ensure complex systems meet operational requirements. The centers assist with the development and choice of system concepts and architectures; the specification of technical system and subsystem requirements and interfaces; the prioritization of system-of-systems engineering capabilities; and the testing and verification of performance, among others.[14]

According to NSF and as shown in **Appendix A**, 26 of the 41 current FFRDCs are R&D laboratories, 10 are study and analysis centers, and 5 are system engineering and integration centers.

Characteristics of FFRDCs

The FAR governs the establishment, use, review, and termination of FFRDCs.[15] According to the FAR, FFRDCs are intended to address an R&D need that cannot be met as effectively by the federal government or the private sector alone. FFRDCs are intended to only perform work that cannot be done by other contractors. FFRDCs accomplish their R&D through a strategic relationship with their sponsoring agency. Two overarching characteristics—special access and longevity—define this strategic relationship.

An FFRDC may be given special access to government and supplier data, employees, and facilities.[16] This access is beyond what is typical in a normal contractual relationship and may include access to sensitive and proprietary information. Accordingly, the FAR requires that FFRDCs (1) operate in the public interest with objectivity and independence, (2) be free from organizational conflicts of interest, and (3) fully disclose their activities to their sponsoring agency.[17] Additionally, FFRDCs are not allowed to use their special access to privileged information, equipment, or property to compete with the private sector for federal R&D contracts. However, an FFRDC is allowed to perform work for other agencies when the capabilities of the FFRDC are not available in the private sector. Finally, the prohibition against competing with the

[13] NSF includes an "activity" column in its *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers*.

[14] U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *DOD Instruction 5000.77: DOD Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) Program*, December 13, 2019, pp. 31-32, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/500077p.PDF?ver=2019-12-13-105837-287.

[15] FAR 35.017.

[16] FAR 35.017(a)(2).

[17] FAR 35.017(a)(2).

private sector for federal R&D contracts does not apply to the parent organization or any subsidiary of the parent organization associated with an FFRDC.[18]

The other defining characteristic is the long-term relationship between an FFRDC and its sponsoring agency. Under the FAR, the initial contract period of an FFRDC may be up to five years, but these contracts may be renewed, following a review, in increments of up to five years.[19] For example, one DOE FFRDC—the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory—has been operating under the same contract since 1964. The FAR encourages long-term contracts to provide stability and continuity that are intended to allow an FFRDC to attract high-quality personnel.[20] Additionally, under the FAR, a long relationship is required to enable the FFRDC to maintain in-depth expertise, stay familiar with the needs of the agency, provide a quick response capability, and maintain objectivity and independence.[21]

In addition to the described characteristics and requirements, prior to establishing an FFRDC, a sponsoring agency must make sure that there are no existing alternatives for addressing the agency's R&D needs (i.e., the research cannot be done effectively by the federal government or the private sector) and that the agency has the expertise necessary to review the performance of the FFRDC.[22] The sponsoring agency must also ensure that cost controls are in place and that the purpose and mission of the FFRDC are clearly defined.[23]

Other organizations, such as University Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs), have characteristics and requirements similar to those of FFRDCs. A brief description of UARCs is provided in the following text box.

[18] FAR 35.017-1(c)(4).

[19] FAR 35.017-1(e).

[20] FAR 35.017(a)(4).

[21] FAR 35.017(a)(4).

[22] FAR 35.017-2.

[23] FAR 35.017-2.

University Affiliated Research Centers (UARCs)

As of the date of this report, there are 15 University Affiliated Research Centers, all sponsored by a DOD military service, agency, or component.[24] UARCs provide access to academic science and technology expertise and engineering, research, or development capabilities of particular importance to the federal agency that supports them. UARCs are located within a university or college and typically receive funding in excess of $6 million per year on a noncompetitive or sole source basis from their sponsoring federal agency. As illustrated in the National Center for Science and Engineering's *Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development*, the amount of federal funding directed to an individual UARC can vary widely. For example, in FY2023, federal agency obligations to UARCs ranged from $355,000 to $963 million.[25]

UARCs are not defined in federal statute. However, DOD has established policies and procedures for their establishment and management.[26] In particular, UARCs are approved by the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, who is using a secondary "Under Secretary of War" title under Executive Order 14347, only after a rigorous requirements review and competitive selection process. The characteristics of UARCs are similar to FFRDCs. The defining feature of UARCs, like FFRDCs, is the long-term strategic relationship they have with their sponsoring federal agency. This relationship is intended to allow for in-depth knowledge of the agency's research needs, independence and objectivity, freedom from conflicts of interest, access to sensitive information, and the ability to respond quickly to emerging research areas.

The primary differences between UARCs and FFRDCs are that UARCs must be affiliated with a university, must have education as part of their overall mission, and have greater flexibility to compete for public and private R&D contracts.[27] According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, DOD oversight of the department's UARCs differs from oversight of its FFRDCs. The DOD military service, agency, or component that serves as the UARC's primary sponsor conducts policy and contract oversight, in contrast to active oversight of a DOD FFRDC (i.e., the DOD primary sponsor must approve all FFRDC work before it is placed on contract).[28]

Federal Funding of FFRDCs

The share of federally financed U.S. R&D expenditures performed by FFRDCs has increased steadily over time—from 5% in FY1953 to 12% in FY1988 and then to 17% in FY2024 (**Figure 1**).

[24] For a list of university affiliated research centers, see https://rt.cto.mil/ddre-rt/rtl-labs/ffrdc-uarc/.

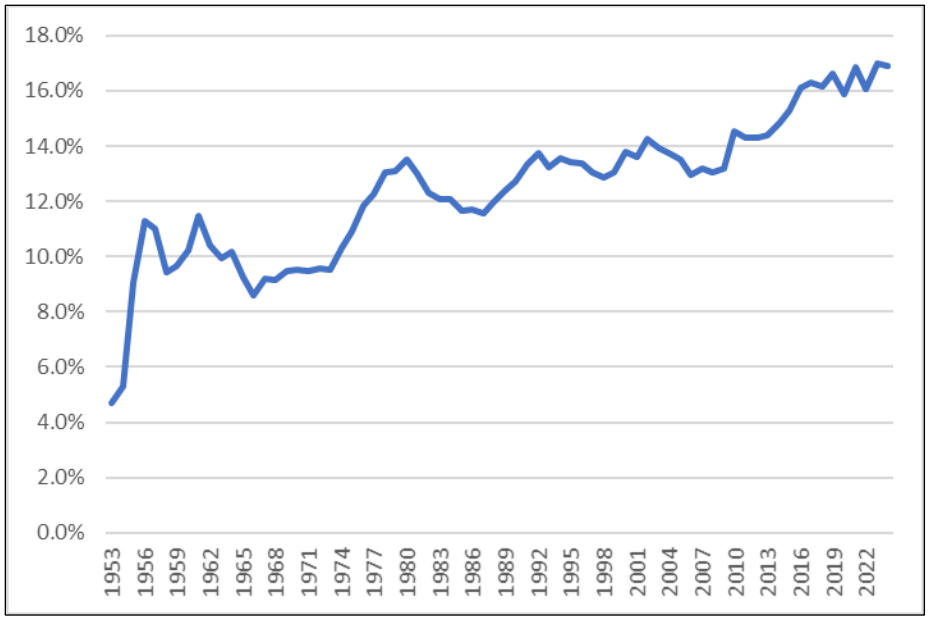
[25] NSF, NCSES, *Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development, Fiscal Years 2023–2024*, NSF 25-328, Table 45, March 2025, https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-funds-research-development/2023-2024.

[26] DOD, University Affiliated Research Center (UARC) Management Plan, July 2010, https://rt.cto.mil/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/UARC-Mgmt-Plan-Jun-23-10-FINAL-6811-with-Signed-Memo.pdf.

[27] Jill M. Hruby et al., *The Evolution of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, Public Interest Report, Federation of American Scientists, Spring 2011, p. 25.

[28] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Defense Science and Technology: Actions Needed to Enhance Use of Laboratory Initiated Research Authority*, GAO-19-64, December 20, 2018, pp. 28-29, Table 1, https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-19-64.

Figure 1. Share of Federally Financed R&D Expenditures Performed by FFRDCs, FY1953-FY2024



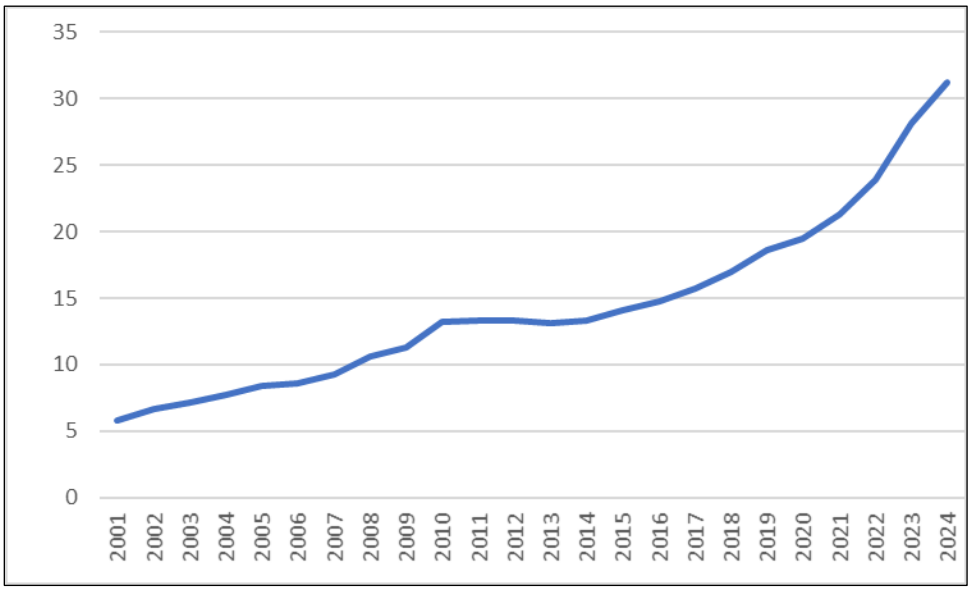
Source: CRS analysis of National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, *National Patterns of R&D Resources: 2023–2024*, NSF 26-313, Table 6, February 2026, https://ncses.nsf.gov/data-collections/national-patterns/2023-2024.

Notes: R&D = research and development. FFRDCs = federally funded research and development centers.

Since FY2001, NSF's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics has conducted an annual survey of FFRDCs that collects information on R&D expenditures by source of funds and type of research performed (e.g., basic, applied, and experimental development). **Figure 2** shows an increase in federally financed R&D expenditures at FFRDCs in constant dollars. In particular, federally financed R&D expenditures by FFRDCs grew from nearly $6 billion in FY2001 to over $31 billion in FY2024 (in FY2024 dollars).

Figure 2. Federally Financed R&D Expenditures by FFRDCs, FY2001-FY2024

In Billions of Constant Dollars

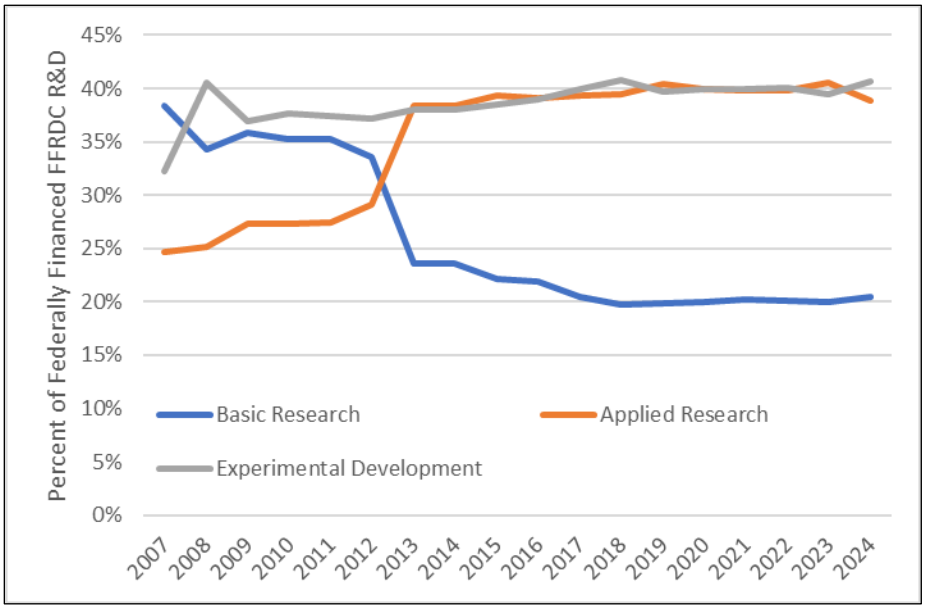


Source: CRS analysis of National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, *FFRDC Research and Development Survey: 2024*, NSF 25-348, Table 2, August 2025, https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/ffrdc-research-development/2024.

Notes: R&D = research and development. FFRDCs = federally funded research and development centers. CRS converted nominal dollars to FY2024 constant dollars using the GDP Chained Price Index from "Table 10.1—Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables: 1940–2031," https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-resources/budget/historical-tables/.

Additionally, the type of research performed by FFRDCs using federal funds has changed over time (**Figure 3**). For example, the share of basic research supported by federal funding at FFRDCs has decreased from 38% in FY2007 to 21% in FY2024. Conversely, the share of applied research supported by federal funding has increased from 25% in FY2007 to 40% in FY2024.

Figure 3. Trends in Character of Work Conducted at FFRDCs, FY2007-FY2024



Source: CRS analysis of National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, *FFRDC Research and Development Survey: 2024*, NSF 25-348, Table 2, August 2025, https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/ffrdc-research-development/2024.

Notes: FFRDCs = federally funded research and development centers. Separate data for applied research and experimental development were not collected prior to FY2007.

Issues for Congress

FFRDCs have attracted the attention of Congress for decades. Historically, congressional concern focused on the growth of FFRDCs and their cost to the government.[29] In more recent years, Congress has focused on the management and oversight of FFRDCs and concerns over their insulation from competition. The following sections describe some of these issues.

Effectiveness of Oversight and Management

The adequacy of agency oversight and management of FFRDCs is a long-standing congressional concern. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about the ability of federal agencies to control costs and address perceived mismanagement at FFRDCs. For example, in 1992, a Senate subcommittee report indicated "that FFRDCs today operate under an inadequate, inconsistent patchwork of federal cost, accounting and auditing controls, whose deficiencies have contributed to the wasteful or inappropriate use of millions of federal dollars."[30] In a 2016 hearing examining the mission and management of DOE's FFRDCs, the former Chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, stated,

[29] For example, see U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *FY73 Authorization for Military Procurement, Research and Development, Construction Authorization for the Safeguard ABM, and Active Duty and Selected Reserve Strengths, Part 5*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., March 1, 1972.

[30] U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, *Inadequate Federal Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., S.Prt. 102-98 (GPO, 1992), p. iii.

> DOE's safety, security, and contract management problems span administrations, span Congresses. From my experience, and as our witnesses will explain, improving DOE's performance requires long, sustained attention to ensure sustained improvement in agency performance.[31]

Congressional scrutiny is driven, in part, by a number of high-profile incidents. For example, in 2000, two Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) computer hard drives went missing and an employee was accused of planning to sell nuclear information to China.[32] In 2004, the mishandling of classified data and the partial blinding of a student from a laser accident closed LANL for seven months, costing $370 million.[33] Additionally, in 2016, an investigation found that LANL mishandled hazardous waste, and nine LANL workers were injured during routine maintenance of an electrical substation.[34]

Since the early 1990s, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has designated DOE's contract management as a high-risk area for fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In 2009, GAO narrowed its high-risk designation to major contracts and projects within DOE's Office of Environmental Management and the National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages three DOE FFRDCs. In 2025, while noting some of the progress made by DOE, GAO indicated that "attention is needed to improve workforce planning, project planning and management, and monitoring construction projects' cost overruns and schedule to make progress on this high-risk area."[35]

Since 2002, DOE has been shifting its FFRDC oversight from a transactional model to a systems-based approach that assesses analytical information collected by the FFRDCs through what is known as contractor assurance systems (CAS).[36] Many stakeholders recognize the use of CAS as a positive step to improving DOE oversight.[37] However, in 2013, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) called on DOE to exercise caution as it transitioned to this oversight model.[38] NAPA indicated that the maturity of CAS varies and that DOE needs to verify the ability of an FFRDC's CAS to identify problems before they occur.

---

[31] Statement of Chairman Fred Upton, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *DOE for the 21st Century: Science, Environment, and National Security Missions*, hearing, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., February 24, 2016.

[32] Suzanne Struglinski, "DOE: Abraham Announces Los Alamos Contract Will Undergo Competitive Bidding," *Greenwire*, May 1, 2003.

[33] Mary O'Driscoll, "Nuclear Safety: Lawmakers Seek GAO Help in Solving Los Alamos Problems," *Greenwire*, February 21, 2007.

[34] "National Labs: Los Alamos' Mission in Question amid Management Turmoil," *Greenwire*, January 4, 2016.

[35] GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, GAO-25-107743, February 25, 2025, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107743.

[36] Transactional oversight is an oversight model that ensures contractor performance by identifying those technical areas, activities, or actions that will be observed, reviewed, or approved by the oversight organization. A systems-based approach, on the other hand, is intended to ensure performance through the implementation of an effective management system that provides high-quality information for decisionmaking. For an example of a DOE contractor assurance system, see Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL), *University of California Contractor Assurance System Description for LBNL*, LBNL PUB-5520, Revision 1, August 2010, automatic download at https://commons.lbl.gov/download/attachments/77332681/PUB+5520+UC+CAS+Description.pdf.

[37] National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), *Positioning DOE's Labs for the Future: A Review of DOE's Management and Oversight of the National Laboratories*, January 2013, p. 47.

[38] NAPA, *Positioning DOE's Labs for the Future: A Review of DOE's Management and Oversight of the National Laboratories*.

In contrast, others view DOE's overall oversight and management activities as burdensome, counterproductive, and a distortion of the FFRDC model.[39] Critics assert that the original benefit of the FFRDC model—flexibility—has been substantially diminished because DOE now micromanages its FFRDCs. According to a 2013 report by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, the Center for American Progress, and the Heritage Foundation,

> Decisions that should be made by research teams and lab managers are instead preapproved and double checked by a long and growing chain of command at DOE. There is no better example of this oversight than the hundreds of DOE site-office[40] employees staffed to regulate lab managers and research by proxy. This adds considerable delay and introduces additional costs to routine business decisions.[41]

Some of those concerned about the detrimental effects of increased micromanagement would like to see a return to the original intent of the FFRDC model: a model where the government sets the overall strategic direction and provides the necessary funding and the FFRDC is given the flexibility to determine how to address the identified challenges.[42] Critics indicate that a lack of trust currently exists between DOE and its laboratories and that in order to return to the partnership envisioned by the FFRDC model, this trust needs to be restored. They recommend that DOE provide its FFRDCs with more authority and flexibility, and then hold each FFRDC to a high standard of transparency and accountability.[43] According to the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, the Center for American Progress, and the Heritage Foundation, if an individual FFRDC does not meet its obligations, corrective actions, including punitive restrictions and possibly the firing of the FFRDC contractor, are valid options, but they assert that the mistakes of one FFRDC should not result in new regulations and additional oversight for all DOE FFRDCs.[44]

In 2022, GAO released a report that "assesses the extent to which DOD's oversight of the FFRDCs includes an evaluation of their performance and effectiveness."[45] According to GAO, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSD(R&E)), which is responsible for maintaining DOD's FFRDC program and establishing policies and procedures for DOD's FFRDC oversight, does not have access on an annual basis to information on the performance and effectiveness of DOD's FFRDCs. GAO contends that such information "could help OUSD(R&E) identify potential duplicative work and opportunities to reallocate resources," in addition to being necessary "to assess the extent to which the FFRDCs continue to

[39] Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, Center for American Progress, and the Heritage Foundation, *Turning the Page: Reimagining the National Labs in the 21st Century Innovation Economy*, June 2013, p. 19.

[40] Each DOE FFRDC has a co-located field office staffed by agency employees who supervise the day to day operations of the FFRDC.

[41] Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, Center for American Progress, and the Heritage Foundation, *Turning the Page: Reimagining the National Labs in the 21st Century Innovation Economy*, p. 20.

[42] DOE, Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories, *Securing America's Future: Realizing the Potential of the Department of Energy's National Laboratories, Volume 2*: *Technical Chapters and Appendices*, October 28, 2015, p. 15.

[43] DOE, Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories, *Securing America's Future: Realizing the Potential of the Department of Energy's National Laboratories, Volume 2*: *Technical Chapters and Appendices*, p. 27.

[44] Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, Center for American Progress, and the Heritage Foundation, *Turning the Page: Reimaging the National Labs in the 21st Century Innovation Economy*, June 2013, p. 24.

[45] GAO, *Federal Research Centers: Revising DOD Oversight Policy Could Assure Access to Performance and Effectiveness Information*, GAO-22105278, July 19, 2022, p. 2, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105278.pdf.

support DOD's priorities."[46] GAO recommended that the next update to *DOD Instruction 5000.77: DOD Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) Program* include a requirement that DOD components sponsoring an FFRDC provide performance and other relevant information on the effectiveness of the FFRDC to the OUSD(R&E) on an annual basis.[47]

In 2024, GAO released a report that examined DHS's oversight of its FFRDCs. GAO found that the coordination review process used by the Science and Technology Directorate—which is responsible for overseeing DHS's R&D activities, including at its FFRDCs—may not include all of the FFRDC R&D projects sponsored by DHS components. GAO concluded that this could result in unnecessary overlap. In addition, GAO found that

> [r]eceiving, analyzing, and sharing key user feedback survey information is a critical underpinning … to assess FFRDC work performance. Yet, [DHS's] FFRDC PMO [Program Management Office] has not addressed issues in these areas that may impact its ability to fully and successfully assess FFRDC performance, such as not understanding potential risks posed by using incomplete survey information and not comprehensively analyzing users' open-ended survey responses in addition to ratings data.[48]

Competition with the Private Sector

Congress and the executive branch have been interested in promoting competition in federal procurement, including the procurement of R&D, for decades. However, federal law explicitly exempts FFRDCs from competitive practices.[49] Historically, critics of this exemption have asserted that it prohibits the federal government from receiving the best possible R&D at the most competitive price.[50] For example, in a 1997 report, the Defense Science Board stated, "the lack of competition for much of the work being done in the FFRDCs is not justified, nor in the long run is it in the best interests of the DOD."[51] Additionally, some critics have pointed out that the R&D capabilities of the private sector have increased since World War II and the continued use of FFRDCs is in direct opposition to their original intent—to conduct R&D that cannot be done as effectively by the private sector or the federal government.[52] A 2016 report by the Defense Business Board—an advisory committee composed of business leaders and managers—stated,

> Today, the for-profit sector can provide most of the technical services that was, in the past, only available from a FFRDC. However, in many cases there remain sound reasons to give the work to FFRDCs, such as avoiding potential conflicts of interest, access to confidential

[46] GAO, *Federal Research Centers: Revising DOD Oversight Policy Could Assure Access to Performance and Effectiveness Information*, p. 18.

[47] GAO, *Federal Research Centers: Revising DOD Oversight Policy Could Assure Access to Performance and Effectiveness Information*, pp. 17-18.

[48] GAO, *Federal Research Centers: DHS Actions Could Reduce the Potential for Unnecessary Overlap Among Its R&D Projects*, GAO-25106394, October 2024, p. 34, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-106394.pdf.

[49] The Competition in Contracting Act (CICA) of 1984 (Title VII of P.L. 98-369) directs competition practices in federal contracting. CICA requires the use of "full and open competition" in the procurement of goods and services. However, the CICA also permits the use of noncompetitive procedures in a number of circumstances, including "establishing or maintaining an essential engineering, research, or development capability" provided by an FFRDC.

[50] GAO, *Competition: Issues on Establishing and Using Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, GAO-88-22, March 1988, p. 8.

[51] DOD, Defense Science Board, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDC) and University Affiliated Research Centers (UARC)*, January 1997, p. 5.

[52] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Times*, June 5, 2012, pp. 8-9.

> competitive information or deep historical knowledge and experience not available in for-profit companies.[53]

Critics have also focused on the use of FFRDCs for systems engineering and integration (SE&I) services.[54] The Professional Services Council (PSC), the national trade association of the government professional and technical services industry, has asserted that the SE&I capabilities of the private sector are as good as or better than those of FFRDCs.[55] According to PSC, "prior to the 1990s, FFRDCs were often favored over for-profit systems engineering companies on grounds of avoiding potential conflicts of interest."[56] However, PSC also suggested that congressionally initiated reforms through the Weapon System Acquisition Reform Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-23) have resulted in a sizable number of private sector SE&I companies that are conflict free, independent, and capable of performing the SE&I work currently going to FFRDCs.[57]

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (Section 895 of P.L. 114-92), Congress included a provision to address concerns about conflicts of interest and unfair competitive advantages associated with sole-source task orders to entities that provide technical advice on defense programs. Specifically, the provision required DOD to review and, if necessary, issue policy guidance related to the identification, mitigation, and prevention of potential unfair competitive advantages conferred to technical advisors to acquisition programs. As detailed in the joint explanatory statement accompanying the bill, technical advisors are contractors, FFRDCs, university-affiliated research centers, nonprofit entities, and federal laboratories that provide, among other services, systems engineering and technical direction.[58] In carrying out the provision, the joint explanatory statement directed DOD to review

> the efficacy of current conflict-of-interest policies, the use of non-disclosure agreements, the application of appropriate regulations, and decisions to allocate resources through direct award of funds to intramural programs or sole-source task orders to entities that provide technical advice on defense programs versus open and competitive extramural solicitations.[59]

In 2019, GAO reviewed DOD's use of study and analysis FFRDCs and found that all five of DOD's study and analysis centers had conflict-of-interest policies and practices in line with the FAR and DOD guidance related to FFRDCs.[60]

It is unclear if the private sector could fully address the work being performed by FFRDCs categorized as R&D laboratories. According to PSC, FFRDCs "maintain laboratories and specialized test and evaluation facilities beyond those available to the government and its for-

---

[53] Defense Business Board, *Future Models for Federally Funded Research and Development Contracts*, DBB FY17-02, October 2016, p. 6, https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2017/DBB%20FY17-02%20FFRDCs%20Completed%20Study%20(October%202016).pdf.

[54] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Times*, June 5, 2012, p. 2.

[55] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Time*, p. 4.

[56] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Time*, p. 9.

[57] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Time*, pp. 9-10.

[58] Joint Explanatory Statement on S. 1356 published in *Congressional Record*, November 5, 2015, p. H7989.

[59] Joint Explanatory Statement on S. 1356 published in *Congressional Record*, November 5, 2015, p. H7989.

[60] GAO, *Federal Research: DOD's Use of Study and Analysis Centers*, GAO-20-31, December 9, 2019, pp. 28-29, https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-31.

profit contractors."[61] Additionally, proponents assert that FFRDCs "occupy a key role in the nation's S&T [science and technology] community that cannot be carried out solely by academic institutions or the business sector."[62] FFRDCs are widely seen as contributing to U.S. technological and economic leadership.

Mission Creep

The diversification of an FFDRC's activities beyond their originally defined purpose—or "mission creep"—is an issue closely related to concerns about competition with the private sector. A poorly defined mission or scope may make it more difficult to determine what R&D tasks are appropriate for an FFRDC to perform and what tasks are better left to the private sector. Concerns over mission creep are associated not only with the broadening of FFRDC activities into new fields, but also with the broadening of FFRDC clients (e.g., work for other agencies). Some analysts have asserted that diversification of FFRDC activities is contrary to the intent of FFRDCs—to serve a special R&D need—and an ineffective means for accomplishing the federal agency's mission.[63] In 1995, a task force examining the future of the DOE national laboratories stated that applying the technical competencies of the national laboratories to new problem areas needed to be carefully managed.[64] Specifically, the task force said such activities

> should not be a license to expand into areas of science and technology which already are being addressed effectively or more appropriately by other Research and Development (R&D) performers in government, academia and the private sector.[65]

Agencies have approached mission creep concerns in different ways. DOE has placed limits on the amount of work its FFRDCs can perform for other agencies. Specifically, if the work for other agencies and nongovernmental entities in a DOE Office of Science FFRDC is 20% above the FFRDC's operating budget, then DOE requires an in-depth review prior to approving the work.[66] Such a review is intended to ensure the work that DOE FFRDCs are performing for other entities will not impede its ability to meet DOE's research needs.

In regard to DOD, Congress has included language each year since 1993 in the defense appropriations bill that prohibits DOD from establishing new FFRDCs.[67] Congress has also placed an annual limit on the number of Staff Years of Technical Effort (STE) that DOD FFRDCs can use to perform work for the agency.[68] STE is a cap on personnel time which translates into a

[61] Professional Services Council, *Federally Funded Research and Development Centers: A Strategic Reassessment for Budget-Constrained Times*, June 5, 2012, p. 4.

[62] DOE, Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories, *Securing America's Future: Realizing the Potential of the Department of Energy's National Laboratories, Volume 1: Executive Report*, October 28, 2015, p. 7.

[63] Letter from Stan Soloway, President and Chief Executive Officer of Professional Services Council, to Dr. Reginald Brothers, Under Secretary for Science and Technology, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, https://www.pscouncil.org/a/News_Releases/Pre-2017/NewsReleases/2015/PSC_Questions_Scope_of_DHS_FFRDC_.aspx.

[64] DOE, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, Task Force on Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories, *Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories*, February 1995, https://www.osti.gov/servlets/purl/10115214.

[65] DOE, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, Task Force on Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories, *Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories*.

[66] DOE, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, Task Force on Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories, *Alternative Futures for the Department of Energy Laboratories*, p. 22.

[67] See, for example, Section 8026 of P.L. 119-75.

[68] See, for example, Section 8026 of P.L. 119-75.

cap on funding levels for each FFRDC. DOD allocates a portion of STE to each of its FFRDCs. Limiting the personnel time available to each DOD FFRDC is believed to drive prioritization of needs and provide greater assurance that the work being performed by FFRDCs is appropriate in scope.[69] As noted by the Defense Business Board, the STE limitation does not apply to work that DOD FFRDCs perform for other agencies and "it is not clear how much rigor is applied to the [STE] allocation process."[70] According to a 2018 report by GAO, DOD officials reported that the STE limitation "significantly constrains the use of DOD's FFRDCs and that DOD customer demand for their services is significantly greater than the annual STE limit," which leads to FFRDC-related work being deferred to later years.[71]

In general, according to GAO, federal agency approval of annual FFRDC R&D plans should ensure activities remain within the scope, mission, and purpose of the FFRDC.[72] Additionally, the Defense Business Board recommended that DOD conduct periodic in-depth reviews of its FFRDCs every seven to ten years using independent experts to review an FFRDC's mission and priorities; assess the quality of an FFRDC's work; and assess the relevance of their strategic or technical expertise.[73]

Competition of FFRDC Contracts

A hallmark of FFRDCs is the long-term relationship each has with its sponsoring agency. A long-term relationship is believed to provide stability and continuity and is considered central to attracting and retaining scientific and technical expertise. Many FFRDCs have been managed by the same contractor since they were created. For example, Associated Universities, Inc. has operated NSF's National Radio Astronomy Observatory since 1956; RAND Corporation has operated DOD's Project Air Force since 1946; and MITRE Corporation has operated FAA's Center for Aviation System Development since 1990.

Some Members of Congress, GAO, and others have criticized the use of noncompetitive procedures for FFRDC contracts.[74] These critics view competition as the best way to decrease costs and increase quality. For example, in 2003, a report by the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Use of Competitive Procedures for the Department of Energy Labs found that "competition imposes discipline and can elicit quality performance and efficient operation in ways simply not inspired by oversight alone."[75]

---

[69] GAO, *Federal Research: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Management and Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, GAO-09-15, October 2008, p. 16.

[70] Defense Business Board, *Future Models for Federally Funded Research and Development Contracts*, DBB FY17-02, October 2016, p. 8, https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2017/DBB%20FY17-02%20FFRDCs%20Completed%20Study%20(October%202016).pdf.

[71] GAO, Office, *Defense Science and Technology: Actions Needed to Enhance Use of Laboratory Initiated Research Authority*, GAO-19-64, December 20, 2018, p. 34.

[72] GAO, *Federal Research: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Management and Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, GAO-09-15, October 2008, p. 15.

[73] Defense Business Board, *Future Models for Federally Funded Research and Development Contracts*, DBB FY17-02, October 2016, p. 9, https://dbb.defense.gov/Portals/35/Documents/Reports/2017/DBB%20FY17-02%20FFRDCs%20Completed%20Study%20(October%202016).pdf.

[74] See, for example, U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, *Inadequate Federal Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess., S.Prt. 102-98 (GPO, 1992), p. 31.

[75] DOE, Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Use of Competitive Procedures for the Department of Energy Labs, *Competing the Management and Operations Contracts for DOE's National Laboratories*, November 2003, p. 10.

DOE has shifted from a position of not regularly conducting full and open competitions for its FFRDCs to routinely subjecting its FFRDCs to competition. Congressional action spurred this shift. Specifically, between FY1998 and FY2009 congressional appropriations acts mandated the use of competition for all DOE FFRDC contracts unless the Secretary of Energy granted a waiver to competition and provided the appropriations committees with a detailed justification for the waiver.[76]

Annual appropriations language was not included after FY2009 because on December 22, 2009, the Secretary of Energy released a policy on the agency's use of competition for the management and operation of its FFRDCs.[77] The policy states,

> DOE does not default to a posture of determining *a priori* either that the Department will conduct competitions for all its M&O contracts, or that it will extend all these contracts. DOE recognizes a preference for full and open competition, and exercises, on a case-by-case basis, the authorities available to the Secretary.

According to DOE, the agency generally uses full and open competition under the following circumstances: when the performance of an FFRDC operator is viewed as unsatisfactory; when the potential for improved costs or technical performance has been identified; when viable alternatives exist in the marketplace; or when the agency decides to change the focus or mission of an FFRDC.[78] In 2018, DOE awarded a new contract to Triad National Security, LLC—a partnership between Battelle Memorial Institute, the Texas A&M University System, and the Regents of the University of California—for the management and operation of Los Alamos National Laboratory. The new contract was awarded due to concerns with the performance of the previous contractor, which included health and safety issues.[79] Media reports, however, questioned the ability of Triad National Security to make significant improvements as one of the entities involved in the partnership, the University of California, was part of the previous contract management team.[80]

Although competition is widely seen as an important tool for increasing performance and efficiency, some experts have asserted that there are downsides associated with the competition of FFRDC contracts.[81] Specifically, critics view competition of existing FFRDCs as disruptive, costly, and harmful to FFRDC productivity.[82] According to DOE in 2009, the time to conduct an FFRDC competition was approximately 18 months of DOE staff time, and it was estimated to

[76] See, for example, Section 301 of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act, 2002, P.L. 107-66.

[77] DOE, *Policy Regarding the Competition of Contracts to Manage and Operate Its National Laboratories*, December 22, 2009, https://science.osti.gov/-/media/lp/pdf/management-and-operating-contracts/DOE_Policy_Extension_or_Competition_of_Contracts_for_National_Labs_2009-12-22.pdf.

[78] DOE, *Policy Regarding the Competition of Contracts to Manage and Operate Its National Laboratories*.

[79] GAO, *National Nuclear Security Administration Contracting: Review of the NNSA Report on the Los Alamos National Laboratory Contract Competition*, GAO-20-292R, January 2020, https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-292R.

[80] Rebecca Moss, "The Government's New Contractor to Run Los Alamos Includes the Same Manager It Effectively Fired for Safety Problems," *ProPublica*, June 8, 2018, https://www.propublica.org/article/new-contractor-los-alamos-university-of-california-safety-problems.

[81] DOE, *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Use of Competitive Procedures for the Department of Energy Labs: Competing the Management and Operations Contracts for DOE's National Laboratories*, November 2003, p. 14.

[82] DOE, *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Use of Competitive Procedures for the Department of Energy Labs: Competing the Management and Operations Contracts for DOE's National Laboratories*.

cost a contractor preparing a bid between $3 million and $5 million.[83] In describing its experiences with increased competition, DOE has stated,

> Although some efficiencies or improved contractual agreements have been made possible as a result of the new contracts the overall performance of the new contractors has in most cases not surpassed that of the old, and it is arguable that what improvements have been observed could have been achieved even in the absence of competition.[84]

In 2008, GAO found that while most agencies required full and open competition for their FFRDC contracts, DOD continued to award noncompetitive or sole-source contracts to its FFRDCs.[85] However, GAO also found that in response to criticism, DOD began conducting more detailed and comprehensive reviews before renewing its FFRDC contracts.[86] Additionally, a 2009 report by NASA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that the agency did not conduct an assessment of possible competitors, as required by the FAR, for operation of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.[87] According to the NASA OIG, without performing the assessment NASA could not determine if it was getting the best value for the operation of its FFRDC.[88]

Condition of FFRDC Infrastructure

Similar to other federal laboratories, the facilities and infrastructure of many FFRDCs are decades old. For example, according to a 2024 report by the National Science and Technology Council, the average age of DOE's national laboratories is 46 years, close to the end of the 40-50 year planned design life of the facilities. Additionally, "nearly 40 percent of DOE facilities have been rated as substandard or inadequate to serve DOE's mission."[89]

NASA's Inspector General has also identified aging infrastructure and facilities as a management challenge for the agency. This includes NASA's FFRDC, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)—64% of JPL's facilities are 50 years old or older.[90]

---

[83] DOE, *Policy Regarding the Competition of Contracts to Manage and Operate Its National Laboratories*, December 22, 2009, https://science.osti.gov/-/media/lp/pdf/management-and-operating-contracts/DOE_Policy_Extension_or_Competition_of_Contracts_for_National_Labs_2009-12-22.pdf.

[84] DOE, *Policy Regarding the Competition of Contracts to Manage and Operate Its National Laboratories*.

[85] The Competition in Contracting Act of 1984 (P.L. 98-369) includes a statutory exemption for FFRDCs.

GAO, *Federal Research: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Management and Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, GAO-09-15, October 2008, p. 9.

[86] GAO, *Federal Research: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Management and Oversight of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers*, p. 29.

[87] Office of Inspector General (OIG), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), *NASA Should Reconsider the Award Evaluation Process and Contract Type for the Operation of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory*, IG-09-022-R, September 25, 2009, p. iii.

[88] OIG, NASA, *NASA Should Reconsider the Award Evaluation Process and Contract Type for the Operation of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory*, IG-09-022-R, September 25, 2009, p. iii.

[89] White House, Office of Science and Technology Policy, National Science and Technology Council, U.S. Federal Research and Development Infrastructure: A Foundation of the Nation's Global Scientific Leadership and Future Economic and National Security, May 2024, p. 11, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/NSTC-Report-on-RDI-Global-Competition-and-Modernization.pdf.

[90] OIG, NASA, *2025 Report on NASA's Top Management and Performance Challenges*, January 2026, p. 13; and OIG, NASA, *NASA's Approach to Infrastructure and Operational Resilience*, IG-25-008, August 4, 2025, p. 4.

Concluding Observations

As Congress determines what, if any, action to take to address potential concerns associated with the oversight, management, or use of FFRDCs, it may consider actions directed at an individual agency's policies and practices or it may consider actions that would address all FFRDCs.

For example, in accordance with GAO's recommendation, Congress could direct DOD to modify DOD Instruction 5000.77 to include a requirement that DOD components sponsoring an FFRDC provide performance and other relevant information on the effectiveness of the FFRDC to the OUSD(R&E) on an annual basis. Alternatively, Congress could require changes to the FAR system specifying what performance data and information related to effectiveness must be collected by all FFRDCs. Congress may also consider requiring sponsoring agencies to periodically solicit independent analysis and examination of an FFRDC's core competencies and their relevance to the agency's mission and priorities, in addition to an assessment of the quality of an FFRDC's work and the effectiveness of agency oversight and management.

Congress may also consider what, if any, impact the age of an FFRDC's facilities (i.e., R&D laboratories) has on the ability of an FFRDC to perform its core competencies in support of an agency's mission. Congress could provide additional funds to federal agencies to address infrastructure-related concerns. Alternatively, Congress could direct federal agencies to seek alternative R&D performers (e.g., universities, nonprofits, or businesses) for any R&D that would be negatively impacted by the current state of an FFRDC's infrastructure.

Appendix A. List of Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs), as of February 2026

Sponsoring Agency	Name of FFRDC	Activity Type	Contractor	FY2024 Federally Funded R&D Expenditures (in millions)
Department of Defense	Aerospace Federally Funded Research and Development Center	Systems Engineering and Integration Center	The Aerospace Corporation	$1,309.8
	Arroyo Center	Study and Analysis Center	RAND Corp.	$37.7
	Center for Communications and Computing	R&D Laboratory	Institute for Defense Analyses	$85.2
	Center for Naval Analyses	Study and Analysis Center	The CNA Corporation	$100.0
	Lincoln Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	$1,360.6
	National Defense Research Institute	Study and Analysis Center	RAND Corp.	$71.5
	National Security Engineering Center	Systems Engineering and Integration Center	MITRE Corp.	$1,431.7
	Project Air Force	Study and Analysis Center	RAND Corp.	$47.8
	Software Engineering Institute	R&D Laboratory	Carnegie Mellon University	$147.4
	Systems and Analyses Center	Study and Analysis Center	Institute for Defense Analyses	$234.6
Department of Energy	Ames Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Iowa State University	$38.7
	Argonne National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	UChicago Argonne, LLC	$1,075.8

Sponsoring Agency	Name of FFRDC	Activity Type	Contractor	FY2024 Federally Funded R&D Expenditures (in millions)
	Brookhaven National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Brookhaven Science Associates, LLC	$747.5
	Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Fermi Forward Discovery Group, LLC	$423.7
	Idaho National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Battelle Energy Alliance, LLC	$1,594.1
	Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	University of California	$1,140.3
	Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Lawrence Livermore National Security, LLC	$2,188.8
	Los Alamos National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Triad National Security, LLC	$3,918.3
	National Laboratory of the Rockies (formerly National Renewable Energy Laboratory)	R&D Laboratory	Alliance for Energy Innovation, LLC	$847.8
	Oak Ridge National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	UT-Battelle, LLC	$2,091.2
	Pacific Northwest National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Battelle Memorial Institute	$1,585.7
	Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Princeton University	$135.7
	Sandia National Laboratories	R&D Laboratory	National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia, LLC	$4,584.0
	Savannah River National Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Battelle Savannah River Alliance, LLC	$250.4
	SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Stanford University	$527.4
	Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility	R&D Laboratory	Jefferson Science Associates, LLC	$181.7
Department of Health and Human Services	CMS Alliance to Modernize Healthcare	Study and Analysis Center	MITRE Corp.	$248.8

Sponsoring Agency	Name of FFRDC	Activity Type	Contractor	FY2024 Federally Funded R&D Expenditures (in millions)
	Frederick National Laboratory for Cancer Research	R&D Laboratory	Leidos Biomedical Research, Inc.	$893.5
Department of Homeland Security	Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center	Study and Analysis Center	RAND Corp.	$77.6
	Homeland Security Systems Engineering and Development Institute	Systems Engineering and Integration Center	MITRE Corp.	$250.3
	National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center	Study and Analysis Center	Battelle National Biodefense Institute	$50.5
Department of Transportation	Center for Advanced Aviation System Development	R&D Laboratory	MITRE Corp.	$163.8
Department of the Treasury, Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Social Security Administration	Center for Enterprise Modernization	Systems Engineering and Integration Center	MITRE Corp.	$281.2
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	Jet Propulsion Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	California Institute of Technology	$2,647.8
National Institute of Standards and Technology (Department of Commerce)	National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence	Systems Engineering and Integration Center	MITRE Corp.	$23.6
National Science Foundation	National Radio Astronomy Observatory	R&D Laboratory	Associated Universities, Inc.	$104.2
	National Solar Observatory	R&D Laboratory	Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc.	$38.5
	NSF National Center for Atmospheric Research	R&D Laboratory	University Corporation for Atmospheric Research	$177.0

Sponsoring Agency	Name of FFRDC	Activity Type	Contractor	FY2024 Federally Funded R&D Expenditures (in millions)
	NSF National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory	R&D Laboratory	Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc.	$103.0
	Science and Technology Policy Institute	Study and Analysis Center	Institute for Defense Analyses	$12.0
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	Center for Nuclear Waste Regulatory Analyses	Study and Analysis Center	Southwest Research Institute	$4.4

Source: National Science Foundation (NSF), National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), *Master Government List of Federally Funded R&D Centers,* February 2026, http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/ffrdclist/; and CRS analysis of data from NSF, NCSES, *FFRDC Research and Development Survey: 2024*, NSF-25-348, August 2025, Table 4, https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/ffrdc-research-development/2024.

Notes: R&D = research and development.

Author Information

Marcy E. Gallo
Analyst in Science and Technology Policy

Disclaimer