

# 2018 Federal Scientists Survey FAQ

## *Why is UCS surveying government scientists?*

The 2018 survey of government scientists is part of ongoing research by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) to better understand the state of scientific integrity in federal agencies and departments and government scientists' work environment. The findings are used to inform improvements in government policies and practices so that independent science can fully inform policy decisions and that federal scientists are able to do their jobs effectively. Since 2005, UCS has surveyed thousands of federal scientists across multiple federal agencies under both the Obama and George W. Bush administrations. Our past survey work can be found here: [www.ucsusa.org/surveys](http://www.ucsusa.org/surveys).

## *Who are the Union of Concerned Scientists?*

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1969 that conducts analysis and advocacy to advance the role of science in decision making in a range of science policy areas. The Center for Science and Democracy at UCS conducts research on how science is used and misused in government policymaking and advocates for the full and transparent use of independent science in our democracy. Our funding comes from individual donors and private foundations; we do not seek government or corporate funding. You can learn more about the Union of Concerned Scientists at [ucsusa.org](http://ucsusa.org).

## *Who is conducting and funding this survey?*

The survey ideas, questions, and concepts were initiated by researchers at the Union of Concerned Scientists. A significant majority of funding for this study was provided through UCS members and foundation grants. UCS is contracting with the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology (CSSM) at Iowa State University because of their deep expertise in the technical and operational aspects of sample surveys through research, support, and operational services since 1938. CSSM partnered with UCS on some prior surveys of federal scientists. See CSSM's project webpage for this survey at <https://www.cssm.iastate.edu/federal-scientists-survey>. Additionally, the scientific society the American Geophysical Union and other nonprofit organizations including the Government Accountability Project, Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth, are providing funding or expert input into elements of the survey.

### ***How were survey participants identified?***

UCS identified several key science-based agencies where scientific integrity is an important issue. Given resources available, we chose federal agencies with a strong science-based mission, that implement science-based policies, or have a history of scientific integrity concerns. For the 2018 survey the following agencies are being surveyed:

- US Department of Energy Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- US Food and Drug Administration
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Geological Survey
- US National Park Service
- Bureau of Ocean Management
- Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement
- US Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service
- US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service
- US Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- US Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service
- Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- US Census Bureau

UCS researchers accessed staff names, email addresses, and job titles at these federal agencies via publicly available databases or through Freedom of Information Request Act (FOIA) requests. From these staff lists, employees were identified, where possible, as scientific positions or nonscientific positions based on job title. For the purpose of this survey, scientists were considered as anyone whose job involves a significant level of science, including but not limited to research, operations, modeling, inspection and oversight, and science policy. All survey participants are then asked what percentage of their work is related to science.

For the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Census Bureau, and the Department of Energy, we were unable to obtain comprehensive job title information. Further, we are only including one component of the Department of Energy because the department has refused to grant us access to its employee list; a FOIA request has languished at the department since March 2017.

### ***How will personal information be kept confidential?***

Potential survey participants receive a randomized identification number (access code) that is associated with their email address. The purpose of this code number is to limit access to the

survey, as much as possible, to only those who are invited with no more than one completed survey per person. As soon as participants submit the online survey, their responses are stored in a separate file with no email address, access code, or any other identifying information. As a result, all submitted responses are completely and permanently anonymous. This will ensure that no one, not even the survey administrator, will be able to associate a particular completed survey to a specific individual. Further, after the survey closes, email addresses will be deleted from the survey software (Qualtrics) so nobody will be able to determine whether a particular survey recipient took the survey.

Participants are cautioned not to use personally identifying information in open response questions. Any survey responses that do contain personally identifying information on agency career staff will have such information redacted before being publicly released. Numeric survey responses will be reported publicly in aggregate only. Open-ended responses may be released with personally identifying information redacted and without attribution to individuals. Any agency, office, or division with fewer than 100 responses will not be reported separately in order to protect identities.

### ***How can the survey be accessed?***

Participants receive an email with a link that will take them to the online survey. If participants prefer not to click on a link in an email, they may instead access a pdf version of the survey here: [www.ucsusa.org/2018survey](http://www.ucsusa.org/2018survey), that can be printed, completed, and mailed to Iowa State University's CSSM. You may also call Iowa State University's CSSM at 877-578-8848 (toll-free) to schedule a time with a staff member to conduct the survey via phone until March 15, 2018.

Note: Participants will need their access code from the email in order to mail in a paper survey or complete the survey by phone. Only surveys that include the participant's access code will be counted.

### ***Are there legal barriers to participating?***

Federal agency staff lists are considered publicly available information. Federal agency staff are free to fill out surveys provided they:

- Fill out the survey on their own personal time.
- Do not disclose on the survey any classified information

Most federal agencies have adopted policies that allow staff limited use of government computers when they are off duty (for example, to check a personal email account). All of the federal agencies and departments that are included in the survey have been notified by UCS that the survey is being conducted.

### ***How will the information collected from the survey be used?***

Survey data will be analyzed by statistical experts at Iowa State University's CSSM and UCS researchers. Results will allow the media, the public, and agency leadership to better understand the state of scientific integrity at science-based agencies, and how agencies compare to each other and to themselves across different time periods by comparing to past UCS surveys. Working with Iowa State University's CSSM and funding partners of the survey, UCS will publish the aggregate results of the survey as a publicly available document. The aggregate results and unattributed quotes from open response questions will be shared with decisionmakers in Congress, at federal agencies, the media, the scientific community and the public. The results will be used to build awareness of any scientific integrity challenges identified by the survey and to advocate for changes in policies and practices that would better ensure that science and scientists are able to inform policy decisions across the federal government.

### ***How will you ensure impartiality?***

UCS has worked with multiple survey and science policy experts to ensure impartiality in our current survey. UCS is conducting this survey for research purposes and has developed questions with corresponding Likert scales to measure a wide range of either agreement or disagreement. Questions were developed to assess the status of various scientific integrity issues and are not intended to sway the survey participant towards any particular direction on the corresponding Likert scale. Additionally, UCS understands that scientific integrity is an important issue regardless of presidential administrations and has, therefore, conducted similar scientific integrity surveys since 2005 under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Many questions are identical to questions in surveys implemented in past years. Because the survey cannot be sent to a random, stratified sample, the results represent the views of those who fill out the survey, and do not represent the views of scientists across the agency as a whole.

### ***Does the study have institutional review board approval?***

An institutional review board (IRB) is a type of academic committee that reviews proposed research methods involving human subjects to ensure that these methods are ethical. The boards are formally designated by their university or other research institution to approve, or reject, proposed research projects, or to monitor approved projects. A key goal of IRBs is to protect human subjects from both physical or psychological harm. Approval from an IRB shows that the committee has found that the proposed research project adheres to research ethics involving human subjects. We have received Iowa State University IRB approval for the current survey (IRB approval #18-017).

### ***What if participants don't want to answer certain questions?***

The only required survey questions pertain to the level of science in one's job and federal agency of employment. These questions are required to ensure that we are capturing only scientists and other technical staff at the agencies included. All other questions can be left blank if participants do not feel comfortable responding and most questions also include a "Prefer not to disclose"

option. However, in order to get a more comprehensive window into conditions at federal agencies, it is crucial that respondents fill out as many of the survey questions as possible.

***When will the results of the survey be released?***

The results of the survey will be released publicly in summer of 2018.

***When will you be administering another scientific integrity survey and for what agencies?***

UCS administers scientific integrity surveys approximately every 2-3 years. Provided resources and organization priorities continue, we expect to continue to do so. Choices about what agencies to survey are based on available resources and level of interest and applicability to agencies.

***Can I share information about scientific integrity in my agency in other ways?***

We are unable to add additional participants after the survey is in the field. If you are a federal scientist who was not identified for participation in the survey but would like to share your thoughts and views with UCS, learn how to connect with us with the level of confidentiality and anonymity that is most appropriate to your situation here:

<https://www.ucsusa.org/scienceprotection>. You can also contact us using the methods described in the link above if you have participated in the survey and would like to share additional information with UCS.