

AGENCY OVERVIEW

NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING STATISTICS (NCSES)

SUMMARY OF KEY CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership

No changes; Emilda Rivers continuing as director.

Budget

- NCSES's FY25 budget level was not publicly available as of November 2025.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request for NCSES programs is for \$44 million, a 40% decrease from the comparable FY24 level.

Staffing

- NCSES's FY25 and FY26 staffing information was not publicly available as of November 2025.

Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. The fact that the staffing cuts and the proposed budget cut occurred indicates lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act.

Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency.

IMPACTS

The administration announced the physical move of NCSES out of its current location in Alexandria, Virginia. The move to the new location (a building on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office campus, also in Alexandria) is short in distance but still likely to disrupt operations.

SUMMARY

NCSES faces ongoing resource challenges, with estimated losses in purchasing power and staffing since FY24, and continued uncertainty in the FY26 President's Budget Request. Operational risks are elevated by the proposed relocation, although there are promising developments in AI-related data initiatives, including the National Secure Data Service (NSDS) portal,

integration of the Standard Application Process (SAP), and expanded AI tracking in business surveys. Because of a general lack of information on NCSES, we are not updating our ratings for parent agency support, statistical integrity safeguards, budget, or staffing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we reiterate the recommendation from last year, namely that:

- The National Science Foundation (NSF) should explore with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Congress ways to give NCSES more staff, thereby contributing to its agility and professional autonomy. A potential option would be to align with the practices of most other federal statistical agencies by consolidating NCSES's two budget lines, programs and staffing, and giving NCSES authority to optimize the combined budget across salaries and expenses.
- Some portion of the NCSES budget should be allowed to be multiyear funding. This is essential for supporting and fostering innovation as well as survey development and administration. This would be particularly beneficial to surveys and other programmatic activities that do not operate on an annual cycle.
- NSF should take steps to ensure NCSES statistical integrity safeguards are aligned with the 10 components of professional autonomy discussed in the 2024 report, including hiring and naming of leadership under the director.
- NSF should continue to explore how to leverage its statistical official to support NSF-wide data and analytical initiatives in line with the requirements set forth in the Evidence Act.
- For the shared services it provides to NCSES, NSF should work to ensure they are provided to NCSES in a manner as timely and efficient as possible so as not to impede NCSES's agility and ability to meet its mission.
- To the extent possible, within the myriad of demands with its limited budget, NSF could discuss with NCSES and the Office of the Chief Statistician of the United States what could be achieved with additional funding and staffing and the overall benefit to NCSES, NSF, and the federal statistical system.

NCSES 2024 HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

For full text, see <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskNCSES>.

The July 2024 assessment of the NCSES reveals the principal federal statistical agency for science and engineering data demonstrating exceptional innovation and government-wide leadership yet constrained by severe staffing limitations and reliance on NSF for budget and operational decisions that impact agility.

KEY SUCCESSES AND STRENGTHS

NCSES demonstrates extraordinary government-wide leadership in implementing the Evidence Act and CHIPS and Science Act, chairing the Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building (ACDEB), leading the National Secure Data Service Demonstration Project (NSDS), serving as Project Management Office for the Standard Application Process (SAP), and establishing America's Data Hub Consortium for collaborative research. The agency maintains a strong innovation culture, adding 80 data sources since July 2018 and implementing strategic reorganization to remain flexible. On behalf of the National Science Board, NCSES produces the congressionally mandated biennial Science and Engineering Indicators report delivered to the President and Congress. NCSES also produces the biennial congressionally mandated report on the Characteristics of Scientists and Engineers. The agency demonstrates exceptional data user engagement, with 27 conferences organized over 3 years, and receives strong NSF budgetary support, with consistent increases over the last dozen years. NCSES staff received NSF Director's awards recognizing excellence, and the agency's publications have been widely cited across diverse research communities, including 3,240 citations from FY20 to FY22. The agency maintains long-standing collaborative partnerships spanning intellectual, technical, and financial support with other agencies.

CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES

NCSES faces severe staffing constraints—its most critical challenge. The agency's budget-to-staff ratio is roughly three times the median of other federal statistical agencies, with staffing determined through an NSF-wide account rather than direct control. This limitation, compounded by expanded CHIPS and Science Act and Evidence Act responsibilities, forces over-reliance on contractors, inhibiting agility and risking transfer of technical expertise from NCSES to contractors. The staffing mix is heavily weighted toward senior experts, with few junior staff, introducing knowledge management risks from attrition. NCSES lacks full decision authority for hiring and IT systems and has no statutory autonomy protections. NCSES's budget isn't publicly available until the President's Budget Release one to two years later, creating an opaqueness to the process. The agency has limited engagement in NSF internal budget discussions and must obtain NSF approval for outreach with select stakeholders, including Congress.

2024 SUPPORT RATINGS SUMMARY

The assessment assigned:

- Statistical integrity safeguards: **Mixed**, noting lack of full hiring and IT decision authority plus absence of statutory protections;
- Parent agency: **Mixed**, recognizing consistent budget support and general respect for autonomy but shared services sometimes impeding agility;
- Budget: **Mixed**, acknowledging consistent increases but inadequacy for expanding mandates; and
- Staffing level: **Challenging**, highlighting the budget-to-staff ratio three times the median of other agencies.