

Increased use of technology in surveys has the potential to provide operational and cost efficiencies at all stages of the survey process, including the survey invitation stage. The Survey of Science and Engineering Research Facilities (Facilities Survey), sponsored by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), is a congressionally mandated, biennial survey that collects data on research facilities at U.S. colleges and universities. The Facilities Survey has traditionally sent survey invitations to institutional coordinators via Fed Ex to allow for tracking and to convey the importance of the survey. For the FY 2015 Facilities Survey we conducted an experiment designed to test whether a change in the coordinator contact procedures will increase data collection and cost efficiencies. This response experiment tested sending the initial survey request to coordinators via email, rather than by overnight delivery. In addition to potential improvements in the speed and efficiency of the initial contact process, the initial contact email also replaced the follow-up coordinator email typically sent a week after the paper package. That email was designed to verify that the recipient will act as coordinator and could meet the due date. This change would potentially allow problem situations to be identified and resolved more quickly. However, there were some potential disadvantages. For a variety of reasons some email messages may be undeliverable and coordinators may give less attention to an email message versus a higher profile overnight package containing a letter on NSF letterhead. In our experiment respondents were randomly assigned to the control (Fed Ex) and experiment (email) group and three outcome measures were examined: unit response rate, speed of response, and number of follow-up contacts. Here we present the results of that experiment including lessons learned.