

The MITRE Corporation

Understanding FFRDCs

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A federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) is a unique organization that assists the U.S. government with scientific research and analysis, development and acquisition, and/or systems engineering and integration. FFRDCs address long-term problems of considerable complexity, analyze technical questions with a high degree of objectivity, and provide creative and cost-effective solutions to government problems.

Working in the public interest, FFRDCs operate as long-term strategic partners with their sponsoring government agencies. In order to ensure the highest levels of objectivity, FFRDCs are organized as independent entities with limitations and restrictions on their activities. This unique standing permits special access to government information and a long-term perspective. Since FFRDCs are prohibited from manufacturing products, competing with industry, or working for commercial companies, industry and government confidently provide them with sensitive information. As private entities, FFRDCs have greater flexibility than the government in recruiting and managing a highly skilled technical workforce. Working in this environment, FFRDCs are able to support their government sponsors across a full spectrum of planning and concept development, research and development, and systems acquisition.

The missions and core competencies of the nation's FFRDCs support the diverse research and development requirements of their sponsors, which provide guidance and oversight of the FFRDCs' work. Developing long-term relationships with their sponsors enables FFRDCs to achieve a deep understanding of their sponsors' evolving roles, issues, and challenges, as well as to provide an institutional memory. Sponsors conduct comprehensive reviews of their FFRDCs every five years to ensure the quality, efficiency, and appropriateness of the work program. FFRDCs commonly transfer the practical results of their work to the public through such methods as cooperative research and development agreements, technology licensing, open source participation, and contributions to industry standards.

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FFRDCs work in the fields of aviation, defense, energy, health and human services, space, enterprise systems modernization, and homeland security. They are sponsored by government agencies but are privately administered by universities and other organizations.

